

Transforming Development

Exploring approaches to development from religious perspectives



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Preface

This report presents an analysis and process narrative of the conference *Transforming Development. Exploring Approaches to Development from Religious Perspectives* in Soesterberg, the Netherlands, October 2007, organized by the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development. Participants in the Knowledge Centre are: Cordaid, ICCO, Oikos, Islamic University Rotterdam, and Seva Network Foundation. The Institute of Social Studies is involved through Prof. Dr. Gerrie ter Haar.

Two years after the successful conference *Religion, a Source for Human Rights and Development* in September 2005, also in Soesterberg, a selected group of almost one hundred representatives of faith-based and faith-inspired organizations across the globe, together with policy makers and academics, gathered again. They elaborated on the main outcomings of the first Soesterberg conference, which stressed the need to deepen our understanding concerning the positive contribution of religion to human rights and development, and recommended to develop appropriate strategies.

The participants at the second Soesterberg conference attempted to formulate what these notions mean in the practice of development cooperation. The participants, who generally appeared to be favourably disposed towards considering religion a central aspect of the good life and of development, brought to the attention the often concealed immaterial dimensions of development. Moreover, they managed to think of concrete steps how to integrate this into development thinking and development actions.

Three days of discussion and reflection have yielded rich material. The open atmosphere provided a safe and inspiring place to discuss complex realities. This atmosphere has helped the participants to name, develop and strengthen virtues necessary for a healthy development cooperation.

Evidently, the participants did not ignore nor deny the existence of diametrically opposed views on development or 'the good life', where religion may act as a source of conflict. Opposing visions on development will continue to exist in reality. As such, an integral approach of development will not reduce the complexity of development work. However we

trust that steps have been formulated in this conference report, which can provide both donor- and partner agencies with ideas of how to integrate immaterial dimensions both into their procedures, methods and communication, as well as in their understanding of their development tasks.

We hope that this report will be a stimulus for further reflection on the importance of an integral view on development.

*Prof. Dr. Anton C. Zijderveld,
Chairman of the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development
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1. Introduction

In the Fall of 2007, the Knowledge Centre Religion & Development organized the conference 'Transforming Development: Exploring Approaches of Development from Religious Perspectives' (Soesterberg, the Netherlands: October 15-18, 2007). Ninety-eight participants from twenty-six countries attended. They represented development organizations with ties to Muslim, Hindu and Christian traditions—donor organizations as well as their partners—and academia. Participants gathered with the aim to clarify the meaning of 'integral development', the role of religion therein, and the policy implications for development organizations.



1.1 Reading Guide

This report contains an analysis of the main conference learnings (including policy recommendations), followed by a narrative of the conference process. Those who participated in the conference ‘Transforming Development’ may want to read the narrative first, to refresh their memories. Others may want to focus on the analysis, which can be read without the narrative. Both the analysis and the narrative are best understood against the background information in this introduction.

1.2 The Charge: Soesterberg I

The conference ‘Transforming Development’ was a sequel to the conference ‘Religion: a Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation’ (Soesterberg: September 2005). The first conference—from hereon called Soesterberg I—was organized to flesh out the intuition that religion is an important factor in development practice. Participants strongly affirmed this intuition, seeing roles for religion in articulating development strategy as well as implementation and professional inspiration.

Participants at Soesterberg I also deconstructed development as a Western, secular project. They proposed a new paradigm, named ‘integral development’, which takes the indivisibility of the human person as a point of departure. This became the starting point for the conference ‘Transforming Development’—from hereon called Soesterberg II.

In order to clarify the meaning of ‘integral development’ and the role of religion therein, the organizers of Soesterberg II also followed the suggestion from Soesterberg I to take a *bottom-up approach*, based on participants’ own visions of the good life and their experiences in development work. In doing so, they simultaneously sought to honor the principle ‘*no outreach without inreach*’, an important qualification voiced at Soesterberg I. This means that donor organizations, while working on development abroad, must also reflect on their own identities, including their religious heritages.

1.3 The Context: Donors and Partners

The two Soesterberg conferences are part of an intensive change process in development circles. Donor organizations are currently re-examining the nature and direction of development cooperation, a process that cuts to the core of their identities. The critical self-assessment of especially large, Northern donor organizations has and will have significant consequences for their strategies, their implementation processes, their organizational structures, and their relationships with partner organizations. At Soesterberg II, this context often sounded through in discussions. The learnings of the conference must be seen against the background of an unsettling and yet opportunity-creating change process.

Continuing poverty

One driver behind this change process is the sobering observation that, after half a century of development cooperation, poverty and injustice still reign rampant across the globe. This remains the case despite development successes, such as the reduction of child mortality. In addition, environmental problems, international terrorism, and large-scale migration have begun to present a new range of serious challenges. Consequently, donor organizations have been forced to conclude that continuing along the traditional line of financing ad hoc development projects would be futile.

Partner personnel issues

At the same time, partner organizations are giving voice to various frustrations in their interactions with donor organizations. This is a second important driver behind the change process in development circles.

Partners yearn for more genuine relationships in their cooperation with donor organizations. Their perception of a break-down in relationships cannot be fully attributed to the inevitable differences of money and power between donors and partners. Cultural differences play a role too, especially on two fronts. First of all, in current development practice, Western rationality tends to overshadow relational values. Quality relationships, however, tend to count heavily in local partner organizations and in the communities in which they work. For example, partners find that frequent personnel changes in donor organizations affect their ability to operate well. Second, with faith-based donor organizations becoming increasingly secularized, their faith-based partners are left feeling that professionals at the donor organizations no longer share the same language. These cultural differences are known to the donors, but little seems to be done about them. Partners also voice frustrations about the proliferation of control systems put into place by donor organizations. To a degree, this proliferation may itself be a side-effect of deteriorating relationships. Complex and time-consuming reporting protocols produce significant burdens for partners. When these protocols also turn out to be ill-suited to local circumstances, partners become especially discouraged.

Donor personnel issues

A third driver behind the change process in development circles comes from the ranks of personnel in donor organizations. Due to the pressures of a high work load and quick task shifts, people are stretched to the limit. The need to stay in control and to keep complex organizational processes under control constantly threatens to overshadow the sources of inspiration that motivate many development professionals. Amid meetings filled with plans, results, and budgets, people miss the opportunities and the time to focus on what truly counts in their work. Many yearn for more reflection, quality relationships, sources of inspiration, and even spirituality in their daily professional contexts.

Responding to challenges

Donor organizations are responding to these challenges with a variety of changes, especially at the level of sector reorganization. A key trend involves communication channels with partner organization. Where the standard used to be hierarchical management from a distant, centralized decision making centre, now the model is becoming looser and broader network relationships, held together by shared missions and standards. Consequently, development work will increasingly take the shape of broad programs, carried out through cooperation and decentralized co-responsibility.

This trend creates concern within partner organizations about the future of long-standing ties with their donors. Others within partner organizations welcome the change, recognizing opportunities for mutuality and enhanced effectiveness through networking.

While changes at the level of sector reorganization are fast proceeding, a simultaneous search for ways to respond at the level of core visions and values is taking off more slowly. The need for such deep transformation is widely felt, and organizations have begun to address it. ICCO and Cordaid, for example, have each assigned policy advisors to take up these questions within their organizations.

However, the task is experienced to be largely intractable, especially where it involves reintegrating religion and spirituality in development practice. Among personnel at donor organizations, for example, a significant number *values* taking a secular approach to development work and questions the appropriateness of giving a larger role to religion—even at the risk of continuing to alienate faith-based partners. They point to the checkered record of religions, which includes violations of international human rights, proselytism, polarization, and fundamentalist radicalization. Other professionals at donor organizations may be positively inclined towards giving more space to religion and spirituality in development programs, but they personally know little about established religions, due to their own secular backgrounds. This is even true within development organizations with religious roots, such as ICCO, Cordaid, and Seva.

The pressures of the immediate—deadlines, funding emergencies, changes in political climate—also tend to interfere with deeper transformation in the development sector. The two Soesterberg conferences were ways to transcend these common pressures, even if briefly, in order for donors, partners, and academics to clarify together what deeper transformation towards integral development should involve.

2. Analysis: What is Integral Development?

In order to tease out key elements of the intuitive notion that development must be 'integral', Soesterberg II engaged participants in workshops on fundamental questions associated with development. Several elements emerged broadly and consistently from their discussions:

1. The visions that inspire integral development, as well as its processes, typically have *religious* and *relational* dimensions.
2. Since both religion and relationships are only partially visible, material phenomena, this necessarily means that in an integral development strategy there must be room for aiming at *immaterial goals* and for using *immaterial means*.
3. The typical range of development resources, methods and metrics will have to be adjusted accordingly, with more room for *qualitative* evaluation and *personal* interaction.
4. All of the above will largely depend on development workers cultivating a matching set of *virtues*, supported by the structures and cultures of their development organizations.

While Soesterberg II yielded many other valuable insights as well, these broadly emerging elements of integral development will be the focus of this analysis.

2.1 VISION: The Good Life

In the first workshop, “Sharing Visions”, participants took a step back from the daily challenges of development practice to reflect on the purpose of development, i.e., understood in terms of its connection with perceptions of ‘the good life’. Participants were explicitly asked to reflect on the role of religion in the good life, which for many indeed turned out to be a key dimension. A second key dimension, relationality, emerged spontaneously from all workshops, spanning Muslim, Hindu, as well as Christian perspectives. There seemed to be broad consensus that these are essential focal points for integral development.



2.1.1 Religion

Soesterberg II went beyond Soesterberg I by not only affirming the important role of religion in *development processes* broadly conceived, but also naming religion as an essential, often central aspect of *the good life* in many cultures. This was most clearly demonstrated by the number of participants who had chosen to bring artefacts with religious significance to communicate their visions of the good life. These included religious texts, such as a Bible, but also religiously charged symbols, such as an olive branch (from Palestine), and a candomble (from Brazil).

At the same time, Soesterberg II recognized the potential of religions to obstruct development processes and for many people create a hell on earth, the very opposite of the good life.

Participants illustrated the *ambiguous* relationship between religion and the good life with many anecdotes, suggesting that the last word has not yet been said about what exactly is 'positive' and 'negative' about religion in this regard. For example, can the good life flourish within a religious context that puts much emphasis on human interdependence, or can it only be based on full individual autonomy?

Soesterberg II also illustrated the *diverse* ways in which religion can be perceived to belong to the good life. For some, an intimate relationship with a personal God is essential to the good life, for others certain rituals are indispensable, or a religious community, or the cultivation of certain religious virtues such as wisdom or detachment. Diverse types of religious contributions to the good life emerged from all the workshops, while the focus tradition of each workshop—Hindu, Christian, or Muslim—would contribute yet another range of diversity. Development attuned to the good life will have to take such religious diversity into account, recognizing that there is no one-view-fit-all good life and hence no one-process-fit-all development towards the good life.

This said, Soesterberg II also yielded a *convergence* of views about specific contributions of religion to development. For example, among religious virtues identified as belonging to the good life, sharing emerged across the board and recognizable for participants across religious traditions: whether it be sharing land, sharing a cup of tea, or sharing one's presence with another on a journey. How people can be empowered in their abilities to share—materially, socially, and psychologically—might therefore be an example of a new strategic question for development organizations. This would broaden the meaning of traditional development tasks such as home construction and food production. Here we have a clear illustration of the way in which paying attention to religion as part of the good life would transform development from the inside out.

Also at a general level, participants at Soesterberg II *converged* in affirming the insight from Soesterberg I, that religion "is not just a question of knowledge, but also one of belief and community." Participants at Soesterberg II frequently talked about religion as *part of ordinary life*. Rather than associating religion exclusively with contemplation of an otherworldly sphere, they emphasized how very common activities can have a religious dimension. For example, their visions of the good life included: celebrating Christmas with illegal refugees; helping a suffering person as a way of serving God (in Islam: *ikhlas*); and living righteously, also in daily business dealings (in Hinduism: *dharma*).

In light of the widely held perception that religion belongs indispensably to the good life, and in so far as development is attuned to perceptions of the good life, Soesterberg II shows that development organizations are well

advised to give religion a place not only in their work processes, but also in their understanding of the ends of development—in their core visions. There are many ways to do this besides a conversion-focused mission approach. Simply leaving room for religious development, recognizing its significance without directly supporting the expansion of a particular religion, may be sufficient.

2.1.2 Relationality

Participants at Soesterberg II consistently identified another key aspect of the good life: the ability to experience relationships marked by freely respectful and caring interactions. Some participants called it ‘relationality’. This theme emerged spontaneously from all the workshops. While neither novel nor surprising, it functioned as a corrective to a perceived Western overemphasis on personal autonomy and material wellbeing in current development practice. As such, it represents an important learning point of the conference.



At Soesterberg II, the value of relationality emerged in connection with a range of life spheres. At the level of one-on-one personal contact, participants used illustrations involving male or female partners, relatives, neighbors, friends, strangers, animals, ancestors, and the divine. At the level of communal embeddedness, their comments and stories featured families, clans, villages, cities, regions, nonhuman nature and nature spirits. It is important to note that many participants saw no great divide between human and non-human communities.

Much of what participants identified as good about relationality can be characterized as *immaterial*, in the sense that outsiders cannot perceive it through their senses (vision, hearing, smell, touch, taste). This applies not only to relationships with spiritual parties (sometimes called ‘vertical’—though this is imprecise), but also to relationships with people and other physical parties. For example, a frequently mentioned mark of good relationships was *trust*, which is immaterial (though it may manifest in observable behavior).

Participants at Soesterberg II identified several other social virtues as marks of relationality, including *gratitude, openness, generosity, empathy, hospitality, caring, truthfulness, righteousness, respect/affirmation, repentance, solidarity, and compassion*. In so far as relationality is part of the good life, these virtues can be taken to exemplify what this might mean in terms of specific human attitudes and actions.

As key aspects of the good life, religion and relationality are also connected. Religions tend to underscore the importance of relationality (at least in theory). For example, many creation stories emphasize that relationality is part of the fabric of the universe. At Soesterberg II, one participant brought a Guatemalan pot stove as an artefact to illustrate the good life. To her, gathering around a cooking fire to share food carries overtones of the Christian celebration of the Lord’s Supper. When religion and relationality reinforce each other, the good life is not quite guaranteed, but—given minimum conditions of safety, health, personal integrity, and material sufficiency—it may not be far off either.

Development attuned to religion and relationality acknowledges and, where appropriate within a human rights framework and organizational objectives, fosters those forms of religion and relationality that are important in a particular culture. *At the very least, it takes care not to undermine religious and relational values while focusing on material development.*

2.2 STRATEGY: An integral Development

An integral development can be characterized as a development strategy attuned to local perceptions of key aspects of the good life, a human pursuit that is also in itself a meaningful process. In light of Soesterberg II, we may expect that in many communities such development strategy will include religious and relational focal points. In so far as these focal points are largely immaterial, and hence not clearly visible, an integral development strategy presents a challenge to development organizations that are focused on more visible indicators. Participants at Soesterberg II recognized this challenge. They also emphasized the importance of searching for ways to overcome the ‘handicap’ of invisibility, despite the temptation to concentrate mainly on visible focal points.

2.2.1 Immaterial focal points, boundary conditions, and growth processes

An integral development strategy recognizes and incorporates the immaterial dimension of the good life. This implies, first, that the *focal points* of an integral development programs may be (partially) immaterial. Second, integral development programs may recognize and support (partially) immaterial *boundary conditions* for the good life. (Boundary conditions are prerequisites that continue to be necessary for the good life to flourish.) Third, integral development programs may allow for the immaterial dimension of *development processes* that support the good life and its boundary conditions. Soesterberg II addresses all three of these ways in which the immaterial enters into an integral development strategy.

(Partially) immaterial focal points

Throughout the conference, but especially in Workshop I (‘Sharing Visions’), participants indicated a wealth of (partially) immaterial elements of the good life. Their concepts begin to identify which aspects of the invisible dimension of religion and relationality might function as focal points for integral development. For example, participants referred to such (partially) immaterial goods as a society characterized by an atmosphere of trust, the social virtues of righteousness and compassion (even where these lead to civil disobedience in unjust legal systems), and personal experiences of *friendship*, *Divine love*, and *enlightenment*.

(Partially) immaterial boundary conditions

The goods of the good life, whether material or immaterial, also depend on (partially) immaterial boundary conditions. Soesterberg II showed that predominantly immaterial boundary conditions, such as justice, social reconciliation, security, and participatory decision making, are perceived to be *as essential* for the good life as more material ones. An integral develop-

ment strategy recognizes this. It also recognizes the potential for conflict when immaterial boundary conditions are violated—as, for example, in the case of unjust power relations.

As the participants of Soesterberg II illustrated, religious traditions can help to identify and raise awareness of immaterial boundary conditions. For example, a religious tradition may explicitly teach that the good life emerges only where a society cultivates virtues such as *inclusivity*, *respect for diversity*, *forgiveness*, and *attentiveness to ‘the least’* of its members.

(Partially) immaterial growth processes

Development strategy attuned to the good life will also involve (partially) immaterial growth processes. When these are ignored, key aspects of the good life have little chance of emerging. For example, if in a certain culture the good life is marked by enlightenment, then personal growth is an essential preparatory process. And if the good life is marked by fair exchange, then people as well as institutions will need to learn how to operate through dialogue, respect and reconciliation. Fostering such immaterial growth processes can legitimately be considered part of an integral development strategy.

Where immaterial growth processes are valued, people in developing communities will turn out to have many more *local resources* at their disposal than usually assumed by outsiders looking only for material resources. As a result, donor organizations with an eye for immaterial growth processes will likely perceive increased opportunities for co-responsibility with partner organizations.

2.2.2 Accessing the immaterial

An integral development strategy recognizes and incorporates the immaterial dimensions of the good life, of its boundary conditions, and of the growth processes contributing to both. However, because the immaterial is not directly open to sense perception, it is hard to describe. This creates a temptation for development agencies to focus more on the material aspects of their practice.

Participants at Soesterberg II indicated that continuing to underrate the immaterial would be a strategic mistake, one that would obstruct integral development. They also indicated how, despite the immaterial dimension’s inaccessibility to direct sense perception, development organizations might get a better handle on the ways in which the immaterial enters into integral development programs.

While being invisible, the immaterial may in fact be accessed through various back doors, including people’s own accounts of it. The social sciences largely depend on these possibilities. For example, social networks—which

are boundary conditions for many social goods—are not directly visible, but can be mapped through asking people to identify their relationships with others. Their visible behavior (e.g., whom they visit or send email) can also be a source of information, as can their architecture, art, music, and other cultural expressions of immaterial values and processes.

Development organizations should also be able to access the immaterial aspects of integral development in so far as the immaterial is *intertwined with the material*. When that is the case, the immaterial can be indirectly accessed by means of *reading correlating material signs*. Religious traditions in fact expertly explore this intertwining by working with *symbols*, which are material signs of the immaterial. Development organizations with religious heritages may therefore well consider themselves culturally advantaged as they explore ways to access the immaterial in the practice of their sector.

Such intertwining of the immaterial with the material regularly shows up in the *visible markers of (largely) immaterial aspects of the good life*. At Soesterberg II, for example, Hindu participants referred to relational and religious goods such as *artha* (fame, wealth, and status) and *dharma* (righteousness). Each of these can be recognized by means of physical items and actions (e.g., a balanced barter exchange). At the same time, such correlating physical items and actions can also be appreciated in their own right as belonging to the good life. As one participant put it: “Trust is capital; things only work if there is trust.” Moreover, many immaterial goods tend to flourish under certain *material conditions*. At Soesterberg II, for example, a participant identified “everyone under his or her vine” (a metaphor for distributive justice) as a material condition for families and communities “to have identity”. When such supporting material conditions are newly created in a development context, existing research (e.g., correlation studies) can provide estimates of the increased likelihood of immaterial goods also having emerged.

Furthermore, immaterial growth *processes* may have material effects, by which they can be recognized and their progress assessed. At Soesterberg II, a participant told of increased security in a Filipino community showing up in more small shops being open at night. At a personal level, too, immaterial growth processes can often be observed through parallel physical changes. For example, growth in a person’s meditation life can show up in physical health benefits, like increased immunity. While such material benefits might themselves be considered marks of development success, integral development also values them as evidence of *immaterial growth processes*. (In fact, in an integral development strategy, immaterial development processes will never be used *only* as a means to attain material ends, for that can be expected to undermine the entire effort. Integral development avoids the ‘error of immaterial instrumentalism’.)

Vice versa, material development processes may also have positive immaterial effects and thereby contribute to the emergence of the immaterial dimension of the good life. This may even be the case when the material processes themselves fail to meet their material goals.

A Hindu participant at Soesterberg II shared a telling anecdote of a material failure that was accompanied by an immaterial success:

Once we almost lost our funding for one of our projects. The donor agencies wanted photos of the doors and windows that were supposed to be build. Unfortunately, not enough doors and windows were built. However, there were many very positive side effects: people came together to work, enjoyed themselves and a sense of community and happiness was developed. But these effects are hard to measure.

This example illustrates that the intertwining of material and immaterial dimensions of development is *not a matter of a straightforward correlation*.

In fact, material development processes may also have negative immaterial side effects. One story shared by a participant at Soesterberg II illustrated this. A new water delivery system in an African village took away the need for long walks to a well. As an unexpected immaterial consequence, young men and women in the village also had fewer opportunities for valued informal encounters (see the Narrative, page 32). Including the immaterial in an integral development strategy will involve careful assessment of possible negative immaterial side effects of material development projects. Overall, Soesterberg II illustrated that it is both necessary and possible for the immaterial dimension to play a role in an integral development strategy.

2.3 TACTICS: Transforming Development

In order to translate strategic integral development programs into concrete project objectives, development organizations need to identify appropriate means (resources), methods, and metrics. Participants at Soesterberg II also offered practical wisdom regarding matters of implementation. In particular, they focused on appropriate methods and metrics. Where participants voiced criticism of the status quo, they also offered implicit advice. After all, their perceptions of inappropriate methods and metrics—whether in fact accurate or not—depend on their intuitions of what would be appropriate ways to go about implementation.

2.3.1 Methods matching processes: Pacing

Participants of Soesterberg II also perceived a mismatch between current methods of development work and the parameters of development as a *growth process*. This criticism particularly came to the fore in Workshop IV, which dealt with the relative importance of ‘time’ and ‘eternity’ in integral

development. (For a brief discussion of this pair of concepts, see the appended conference background document.)

Currently, development projects are often designed and evaluated with an eye to short-term results. Participants frequently voiced frustration about the unsuitability of such fast pacing for slow-growth processes, which require a long-term horizon. For example, integral development focused on relationality would recognize the possibility of attitude (trans)formation, including the cultivation of social virtues like patience and respect. As most of us know from experience, such personal maturing processes take time. The same is true for social transformation. Integral development focused on relationality will observe pacing that allows complex social changes to *emerge in stages and to solidify* (e.g., democracy in a traditionally tribal municipality; or social reconciliation between religious factions with a history of bloodshed; or a professional, non-corrupt civil working force). As one participant observed, such growth processes are like an acorn becoming an oak tree: it takes a long time, but the result is solid and strong.

At the same time, participants appreciated the need to get things done within reasonable time frames. Short-term targets can energize people, and a long-term development process might benefit from a series of wisely selected short-term tasks. As the development sector moves away from ad hoc projects to more integrated programming, it will in fact create more opportunities for such consecutive linking. Overall, Soesterberg II delivered the insight that integral development involves *balanced pacing*, with short-term tasks dovetailing the slower pace of many growth processes.

2.3.2 Documentation and accountability

At Soesterberg II, participants considered the ways and challenges of development documentation in Workshop IV. Many participants, especially from partner organizations, shared the perception that current reporting protocols poorly suit the complexities of integral development work, while also presenting a significant administrative burden. At the same time, participants did not question the importance of decently measuring, communicating, and evaluating development progress. Rather, they constructively looked for ways to honor the principle of accountability in the context of culturally diverse and partially immaterial development work. One participant described this search in terms of a stewardship duty: “We have a religious responsibility to measure what we do.”

In Workshop IV, discussions focused on the relative importance of ‘measuring’ and ‘knowing’ in integral development, particularly with respect to immaterial growth processes. (For a brief discussion of this pair of concepts, see the appended conference background document.) On balance, participants saw validity in both approaches, but they also emphasized that in the context of particular development projects, the exact mix depends on the nature of the work.

Based on their own work experience, participants contributed a range of examples. These show very clearly that one should not uncritically associate 'immaterial' with 'immeasurable':

- integral development attuned to *trust* (as a relational focal point) can measure *social capital*;
- integral development attuned to *sharing* (as a relational and religious focal point) can measure a combination of *material or verbal exchanges* and *accompanying affective states*, such as signs of joy or happiness; although joy and happiness cannot be engineered, they can be reliable indicators of having hit the mark of genuine sharing;
- integral development attuned to *fair exchange* (as an immaterial boundary condition) can measure the *ratio of reported violent incidents to arbitration cases*;



As these examples from Soesterberg II show, integral development may require that traditional methods of documentation be put to alternative uses. In the plenary session on Wednesday morning, Prof. Dr. James Cochrane provided a case example of how this can be successfully done. ARHAP (African Religious Health Assets Program) involves mapping health assets that are present within local communities. While these health resources are largely immaterial and steeped in religious beliefs and customs, the methods for mapping their effectiveness are well established within the social sciences.

However, not all aspects of integral development can be measured through distinct indicators, expressed as quantitative metrics for statistical analysis. Participants at Soesterberg II also gave examples of development processes that are better described through more qualitative ways of 'knowing', such

as narrative reporting and participative observation. As one participant observed, one may have to measure invisible, immaterial effects “from the inside: they can be shared by meeting each other and [through] personal involvement of the donors in the projects.” Another participant suggested that the success of qualitative reporting depends on the involvement of local people. Joint ownership of the documentation process appears to be especially important for more qualitative ways of reporting and evaluating.

In general, participants at Soesterberg II concurred that the success of any method of documentation, whether quantitative or qualitative, correlates with the process of its design and use. In the context of integral development, accountability especially requires *mutuality* in conceiving and using documentation protocols. Only thus the requisite sense of shared responsibility will emerge and be kept alive.

Concretely, the mutuality that supports accountability requires that both partners and donors demonstrate *trust* and *understanding*. These are key values for individual development professionals (cf. section 2.4.1) as well as for the cultures of development organizations (cf. section 2.4.2):

- > Mutuality involves *two-way trust*: donors show trust by starting with what local people have (this was also a key insight from Soesterberg I); partners show trust by being open to the possibility that not only money, but also valuable insights and other immaterial contributions can come from Western donors; two-way trust means starting a cooperative endeavor from the default position of trusting the other party to be able to make a valuable and unique contribution.
- > Mutuality involves *two-way understanding*: between donors and partners, and between partners and the communities in which they work. As one of the participants said: “Knowing is not enough. Understanding is needed. This is only possible through ‘marriage’: a true interest in each other and the willingness to compromise and to go another mile.”

Mutuality built on two-way trust and understanding creates and supports goodwill on both sides, which translates into genuine accountability. Partners who feel goodwill towards their donors are more willing to transform passive compliance into active accountability. And donors who feel goodwill towards their partners are more willing to transform inflexible responsibility into flexible responsivity. Such goodwill based on mutuality is indispensable in so far as *active accountability* and *flexible responsivity* are essential for the effective documentation of integral development. Moreover, goodwill based on mutuality is also an expression of relationality, and as such ‘the way’ already belongs to ‘the good life’.

2.4 INREACH: Development Virtues and Organizations

In response to the Soesterberg I charge, ‘no outreach without inreach’, participants at Soesterberg II were asked to identify key attitudes for engaging in integral development work (i.e., personal inreach). In order to be successfully cultivated, these attitudes require a degree of institutional support (i.e., organizational inreach).

2.4.1 Development Virtues

Development virtues can be understood as the backbone of professional ethics in the development field—of what it means to be ‘a good development professional’. They are basic attitudes that shape the professional judgment as well as the personal identity and motivation of development workers. As such, they complement the suite of development competencies that are currently receiving much press in the sector. Both virtues and competencies are necessary for excellence in the practice of development.

The workshop reports from Soesterberg II highlight a number of specific development virtues, including caring, listening, patience, self-criticism, and—especially—understanding. This list can be taken as the beginning of a ‘catalogue of development virtues’, which will have to be worked out and explicated in a process of dialogue between professionals in the development sector. Similar processes in other professional fields, such as medicine and accounting, can be consulted for guidance.

Soesterberg II also provided several examples of how development virtues fit within the practice of integral development work. These help to clarify the importance of paying attention to their cultivation. Integral development work requires:

- > *understanding* relationships within local communities, between donors and partners, and within professional teams; as a virtue, such understanding in turn requires basic attitudes of *genuine interest*, *perceptiveness*, and *suspension of judgment*.
- > an attitude of *openness* towards religion and spirituality in general as being important for many people, and towards specific expressions of religion and spirituality in local communities; a participant characterized such openness as having “a teachable spirit”;
- > *honesty* in assessing positive and negative impacts of religion in development processes, including the willingness to investigate these through dialogue with people from different religious traditions and with critics of religion;
- > the ability to live with complexity, ambiguity, and diversity; this requires a combination of *trust*, *humility*, and *equanimity*;
- > *wisdom* in the face of uncertainties, for development processes will always involve uncertainties that cannot be managed through risk reduction; this requires *caution* and listening to feedback; at times it also requires *courage*;

- > *patience* with long-term development processes, and with their chaotic aspects;
- > *realism* in seeing what can be achieved with limited means;
- > *creativity* in making the most of limited means, including local knowledge and resources (including immaterial resources, such as social capital and traditional customs).



In order to foster the cultivation of such professional virtues, development organizations can leverage internal resources, such as stories that circulate among personnel, the example of internally recognized leaders, and the riches of their religious heritages. In addition, they can draw on a broad offering of external resources, including good literature on the topic of virtue cultivation in general and in professional contexts.

2.4.2 Development Organizations

Participants at Soesterberg II regularly referred to the organizational contexts of development work. Their comments and examples indicate that certain organizational structures and cultures seem to be more conducive to integral development than others. While this was not an explicit topic of discussion, especially participants' sense of frustration with current organisational contexts warrants attention. Behind voiced frustration, after all, lies the intuition that improvement is possible. To the follow-up to Soesterberg II belongs the challenge of discerning exactly which organizational transformations are required to support integral development (i.e., organizational inreach).

One recurring theme was the perception that too much organizational emphasis on *short-term efficiency* undermines other essential values, including the cultivation of a *culture of dialogue* (which had also been a concern at Soesterberg I). An organizational culture of dialogue is necessary for mutuality in development cooperation (cf. 2.3.2). It also allows development workers to cultivate their professional virtues (cf. 2.4.1). As one participant put it, before people can understand each other and respond appropriately, they must learn to ‘speak the same language’. This requires structured opportunities to spend time together and talk or engage in shared activities, both formally and informally. While in the short term such a time investment appears to lower efficiency, it is indispensable in processes of integral development. Participants at Soesterberg II also remarked how the conference itself allowed them to cultivate a culture of dialogue within and across donor and partner organizations.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Considered together, many of the learnings from Soesterberg II fall into a pattern. Whichever way one looks at the concrete tasks that participants associate with integral development, they always appear to be multidimensional. In specifying the multiple dimensions of integral development, Soesterberg II both affirms and goes beyond the recommendations of Soesterberg I:

- > Integral development tasks draw their significance from being *attuned to visions of the good life*, in which *religion* and *relationality* are key components. This implies that integral development tasks can be partially or entirely geared towards *attaining immaterial goods*.
 - Soesterberg I recommended that religion should be considered “a positive force for human rights and development”. Soesterberg II clarified that religions are not only able to supply effective means for development, but religions may also play a key role in envisioning the *ends* of development.
- > Where appropriate, integral development tasks dovetail with *immaterial growth processes*. In such cases, material signs of progress derive their significance from *correlating* with these immaterial processes;
 - Soesterberg I criticized the reigning Western paradigm of development for being primarily focused on material, economic progress. Soesterberg II clarified that true change not only “starts from within”, but may primarily “remain within”, if that is what counts most in a local setting.
- > Integral development tasks depend on *development virtues* and matching *organizational cultures* as preconditions for being well performed.

- Soesterberg I warned that the “outreach” of development organizations also requires “inreach” on their part. Soesterberg II clarified that inreach especially consists of cultivating appropriate development virtues and organizational cultures.

Without considering these dimensions, integral development tasks cannot be adequately defined, carried out, or evaluated.

Religion can play a role in all three dimensions: in envisioning the good life, in supporting immaterial growth processes, and in guiding professional virtue cultivation and the formation of organizational cultures marked by mutuality and dialogue. Thus, Soesterberg II also went beyond Soesterberg I in outlining the *varied* roles of religion in integral development.

As discussed in the Introduction, the current practice of development organizations is already changing in ways that could support this multidimensionality of integral development work. The new programmatic strategy, which emphasizes broad cooperation and co-responsibility, *could* create room for attunement to local visions of the good life, for appreciation of invisible growth processes, and for the cultivation of development virtues and matching organizational cultures. The learnings from Soesterberg II indicate that current efforts to transform the development sector deserve further support, on condition that they be guided to ensure room for the multidimensionality of integral development tasks.

If the learnings from Soesterberg II are to be fully put into practice, additional changes in the development sector are also needed. The following policy recommendations can provide direction:

- > *Attune* the social, economic, and political aspects of development cooperation to fit the multidimensional character of integral development.
 - In particular, redesign traditional development tasks in light of religion and relationality as aspects of the good life, with recognition for immaterial growth processes, and with an eye to the virtues and organizational cultures needed to deliver value in valuable ways.
 - In all of this, build as much as possible on people’s own resources, including their religious and spiritual resources (their ‘infraculture’²). This applies especially to people in local communities, but also to people who work for development organizations.
- > Within cooperating networks of donors and partner organizations, *discuss* specific meanings of ‘the good life’ that could inspire and guide development programs.
 - Specifically, investigate which religious and relational values stand out. Keep these discussions ongoing, for answers will change over time and this sort of fundamental dialogue itself provides a basis for good working relationships.

- > *Research* the complex connections between the immaterial and material dimensions of integral development.
 - In particular, investigate how material means and indicators of development may be used to foster and measure immaterial growth processes.
 - Also, gather case histories to learn from best practices and challenges, and share these insights within donor-partner networks.
- > *Research* the ambiguous, diverse, as well as common ways in which religion enters into development processes.
 - In addition to consulting and commissioning theoretical research, gather case histories to learn from best practices and challenges, and share these insights within donor-partner networks.
 - Learn the symbolic languages necessary to work with specific religions in specific cultures.
- > *Research and experiment* with forms of documentation that fit the nature of integral development work.
 - Consider alternative applications of standard scientific methods;
 - Investigate alternative methods, including more qualitative reporting (e.g., documenting Most Significant Changes [MSCs]).
 - Search for appropriate forms of documentation in a context of mutuality between donor and partners.
- > *Equip* personnel at donor and partner organizations to cultivate essential development virtues.
 - Involve these professionals in critically identifying key virtues and organizational anecdotes that illustrate their meaning in the context of development work.
- > Within cooperating networks of donors and partner organizations, *foster* the emergence of corporate cultures that support integral development and the cultivation of development virtues.
 - Give the elements of integral development a place in accounts of organizational history, identity, and core values.
 - Moreover, pay attention to appropriate reward structures, project timing, and physical work environments.
 - Allow and invite critical discussion, with input from partners and external stakeholders, of organizational vision, strategy, and impacts.

¹ Religion: A Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation, p. 4.

² The term 'infraculture' was used by Dr. Melba Maggay at Soesterberg I to describe the informal and often immaterial resources of a culture, which function like the software that runs on the hardware of structures and institutions.

3. Process narrative

In keeping with the recommendation from the first Soesterberg conference to take “the indivisibility of the human person as a point of departure,” the second Soesterberg conference, ‘Transforming Development’, in its very process integrated ritual and reflection, quiet spirituality and animated speaking.

Each day, the tone was set by a Spiritual Opening. During these plenary sessions of about fifteen minutes, participants from different religious traditions led the conference community in solemn meditation. The first Spiritual Opening started with Arminian flute music in a quiet setting with dimmed lights and a burning candle. Participants mostly gathered in silent meditation. A few prayerful reflections were read by student participants. On the second day, the Spiritual Opening included a Christian prayer spoken in Arabic (the *Sabeel* prayer), which Muslim participants could also understand. During the third Spiritual Opening, nine participants from different religious traditions and one agnostic shared personal reflections.



Visit to an organic farm-annex-care-facility

In the midst of a program filled with workshops and keynote addresses, participants were able to go on excursions. Sites had been selected in the spirit of a key request from the first Soesterberg conference: “No outreach without inreach!” Four groups visited social projects in and around the city of Utrecht. One group made spiritual works of art in the garden of the conference centre. Each excursion in its own way illustrated how, also in the flourishing Netherlands, local people are searching for integral ways of life, ways that might spiritually and materially match integral development globally.

The conference ended with a plenary session in which participants could see the outcomes of three days of gathering through visual forms of documentation (a ‘wall of ideas’ and a ‘peanut bar chart’). In a final ceremony, participants were also able to experience these learnings as the fruits of shared work, carried on in a spirit of inter-religious understanding and support.

Grant us all the courage to confront oppression.

Strengthen our commitment to the work of justice, peace, and reconciliation among all.

Empower us to stand up for truth and to respect the dignity of every human being.

From the Sabeel prayer

3.1 The Addresses

Ineke Bakker, director of the Oikos Foundation, opened the conference ‘Transforming Development’ by welcoming ninety-eight participants from twenty-six countries around the world. By asking representatives from different regions and religious traditions (including agnostics) to stand up, Bakker gave participants the opportunity to appreciate the diversity they brought to the conference and its challenge: to articulate an integral approach to development.

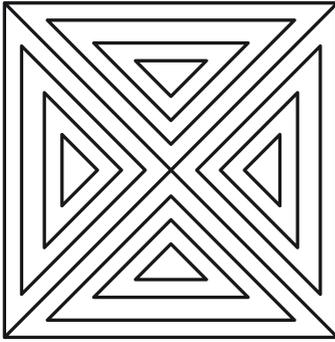
In his opening address, **René Grotenhuis**, director of Cordaid, voiced the hope that his agency is not only perceived as a ‘donor’. Above all, human development is a matter of “sharing from nothing” (cf. Mark 12: 41-44). Grotenhuis also called attention to the fortieth anniversary of the papal encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, a milestone in Roman Catholic development thought. In this encyclical, Pope Paul VI stressed the importance of keeping a balance between the two main pillars of Catholic social thought, *individual dignity* and the *common good*.



The keynote address by **Dr. Philomena Mwaura** provided an example of integral development in the context of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in Africa. According to Mwaura, *integral development is characterized by the fulfilment of physical, social, and spiritual needs*. As a *liberative process rooted in local culture*, this may mean that people gain self-esteem, security, or a sense of purpose. While Mwaura acknowledged the potential of religion “to cause conflict or be used as a tool of oppression”, her address especially highlighted the positive role of religion in integral development. For example, in Kenya the Organization of African Instituted Churches has been instrumental in orchestrating effective responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including the social and spiritual dimension of dealing with the stigma of the disease. (see www.religion-and-development.nl, page ‘transforming dev.’ for the complete text of her lecture).

On Monday evening, participants learned about intercultural Bible reading (see www.bible4all.org) in a presentation by **Prof. Dr. Hans de Wit**, a biblical scholar from the Free University of Amsterdam. The Intercultural Bible Reading project involves Christians in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe, who all read the same Bible chapter (the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman in John 4). From their focused discussions and written interpretations emerges a wide array of culturally embedded experiences of the Bible. These diverse accounts illustrate how the Word of God can be heard differently in different places. A selection of such readings has been collected in “Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible” (edited by J.H. de Wit et al.).

On the second day, day chair **Dr. Margaret Mwaniki** drew attention to the communal conference process of articulating integral development, a process that would take a key turn in the third workshop later that morning (see page 32).



In his keynote address on transforming development from a Hindu perspective, **Dr. Chander Khanna** challenged “the cult of consumerism”, which not only hurts the poor and nonhuman nature, but also keeps attached consumers from meaningfully integrating material and spiritual development in their own lives. Khanna highlighted the Hindu roots of this integral perspective on development, illustrated with a series of slides. Using the

metaphor of a water molecule becoming part of a particular river, an ocean, and again evaporating, Khanna explained how Hindus understand the life of each person within cycles of reincarnation. In this cosmic context, human development especially calls for *intellectual growth*, supported by *material sufficiency* without greedy attachment. Within this developmental process, humankind exhibits diversity-within-unity, for people are holistically connected while also contributing their distinct identities—like many embedded triangles pointing to the centre of a square. (see www.religion-and-development.nl, page ‘transforming dev.’, for the complete text of his lecture).

On Tuesday evening, **Dr. Emin Akçahüseyin** and **Dr. Bünyamin Düran**, boardmembers of the Islamic University Rotterdam (IUR) presented a program on Islam and Development. Established in 1997, The Islamic University Rotterdam has two academic aims: to enhance knowledge of Islam among European Muslims, especially in the Netherlands, and to inform non-Muslims about the religion and culture of the Islamic world. The IUR is a partner in the Knowledge Centre Religion & Development.

In their presentations Akçahüseyin and Düran talked about the possible contributions of Islamic intellectual and scientific institutions to social cohesion in Western society. Düran stressed the importance of Islamic universities and other intellectual institutions in Europe to supply intellectual products which can support identity forming processes of young Muslim generations. As such they can contribute to minimizing the radicalization of some young Muslims in Europe. He mentioned three possible contributions of Islamic institutions:

- They can develop a theological theory by which religious plurality is possible;

- They can also support democratic values by interpreting the religious texts in the light of democracy;
- They can stimulate economic development by encouraging entrepreneurship.



Day chair **Dr. Melba Maggay** opened the third conference day by pointing out the final task of translating insights from the previous days into concrete commitments towards transforming development.

With a case study from sub-Saharan Africa, **Prof. Dr. James Cochrane** illustrated one successful approach to integral development involving health care. The African Religious Health Assets Program (ARHAP) uses a sophisticated social science tool to map the “health assets” of communities in such a way that contributions from

faith-based organizations and traditional healers (“witch doctors”) also become visible. By documenting these religious health assets, the study increases appreciation for their contributions in providing universal access to health care and in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Religious health assets also show potential for improving “the long-term sustainability, recovery and resilience of individuals, families and communities.” (For more information, see the ARHAP website: www.arhap.uct.ac.za)

Mapping religious health assets

In the final keynote address, **Dr. Siti Musdah Mulia** described the role of Muslim organizations in Indonesian development contexts. While highlighting the impact of power relations and politics, Musdah Mulia showed how the wellbeing of poor women and children also hinges on religious interpretations of procreation and marriage. As a female scholar looking for sources of women’s empowerment within Islam, she personally illustrated Islam’s internal diversity and transformative potential for human development. (see www.religion-and-development.nl, page ‘transforming dev.’, for the full text of her lecture).

3.2 The Workshops

Workshop I: Sharing visions (Monday, 2-3.30pm)

For the first workshop, groups of approximately ten participants gathered in various smaller conference rooms. Each group focused on one of the religious traditions represented at the conference: Hindu, Muslim, or Christian.

In this workshop, participants envisioned ‘the good life’ and shared with



each other what they saw. They did this with the help of artefacts, which they had brought from around the world, including tea, pictures, a pot stove, a song, a purse, a pear, and an olive branch. These familiar items made the narratives about ‘the good life’, which were often very personal and culture-specific, easier to envision for others in the group.

In terms of process, each participant first described his or her vision of ‘the good life’ to a neighbor. The neighbor was asked to be an active listener by paying particular attention to ways in which religion featured in the vision of the other participant. Findings were subsequently shared with the entire group. The group then further specified the significant religious dimensions of ‘the good life’.

In all workshops, *relationality* emerged as a key element of ‘the good life’. When relationships are good and just, people flourish and are better able to care for each other and for their natural environments. At the same time, relationality depends on prior conditions, such as fulfilment of basic needs and a recognition of diversity. The latter also requires constructive ways of dealing with religious differences and conflicts, such as creating opportunities for people of different backgrounds to get to know each other.

Various participants remarked how religion inspires them to work for the transformation of society. In the workshop on Hindu tradition, a participant referred to religion as a philosophy that serves humanity, while service to humanity is also service to God. In the workshop on Muslim tradition, a participant identified prayer as a source for solidarity with poor and suffering neighbors. And in a workshop focused on Christian tradition, a participant observed that being “created in the image of God” provides an awareness of all people being equal and connected.

Workshop II: Sharing experiences (Monday, 4-5:45pm)

The same groups gathered again for the second workshop, which had two parts. The first half was devoted to sharing best practices in development, the second half to sharing development ‘nightmares’. In at least one group, however, the nightmares demanded most attention.

Success stories

Participants were asked to focus on a success story about a development project with which they were familiar. In some groups, participants were then invited to turn to a neighbor and share one success story, while the other person listened. (The roles would later be reversed when it came to sharing nightmares). The neighbors were asked to tell the storytellers afterwards what struck them most about the success story.

Best practices in which *religion* plays a significant role were then shared with the whole group, while facilitators extracted development implications on flip-over sheets. Several examples of best practices illustrated how religion can be incorporated in a natural manner in development projects. In certain cases, results could be achieved through religion that would likely not have been possible without it.

A Success Story

In a gang-infested community in the Philippines, local development workers initiated a Bible study group for gang members. Initially, attention span was a problem for these youth, and sessions would be very short. However, the gang members kept coming, feeling that they were appreciated as persons. As time progressed, they also became less violent. The community responded with relief. Due to improved safety, shops could open at night and the local economy improved. One of the gang members explained the change as follows: “Before, I felt that no one loved me, but now I know that God loves me.”

This successful development initiative was carried out without funding from mainstream donor agencies, because it did not fit within standard project requirements.

Nightmares

Next, participants were asked to focus on a ‘nightmare’ related to a development project with which they were familiar. In some groups, participants were then invited to turn to the same neighbor and share one nightmare, the roles now being reversed. The neighbors were asked to tell the storytellers afterwards what struck them most about the nightmare.

Nightmares in which religion plays a significant role were then shared with the whole group, while facilitators again extracted development implications on flip-over sheets. Several examples of nightmares had to do with

the perception among partner agencies that donor agencies insufficiently understand cultural and religious realities. Other nightmares reflect the frustration of partners with what they see as overly rigid or unrealistic donor procedures. Sometimes, nightmares take a turn for the better and become success stories, best practices that are especially revealing, because they show how serious challenges can be overcome.

A Nightmare

A European faith-based organisation assisted in providing an African village with clean water and toilets. When the facilities had been constructed, the village community seemed happy with the new infrastructure.

A year later, the development workers returned to the village. To their dismay, they discovered that the facilities were no longer used. The community had pulled up the water pipes and recycled them for use as spears.

Asked why they had done this, the villagers explained that the easy availability of pipe-borne water had removed the need to fetch water from the stream, which was a distance away. This had robbed the young men and women in the village of the opportunity to make friends and find love partners on these long walks.

Workshop III: Mixing Colors-1 (Tuesday, 11am-12.30pm)

For the third workshop, new groups of approximately ten participants were formed, each with a mix of religious interests and backgrounds. Workshop III was crucial in helping participants move from their experiences to reflection about the underlying paradigms, in order better to articulate matching implications for development work. In particular, Workshop III honored a suggestion from the participants of the first Soesterberg conference, namely, that we take “the indivisibility of the human person as a point of departure.”



Three twin concepts were introduced to help participants articulate how those dimensions of human life that tend to be divided in mainstream development practices can be understood in more integral ways.

1. visible/material – invisible/immaterial
2. individual – communal
3. human – non-human

The conference background document (see appendix A) contains an explanation on these ‘twin concepts’.

Remembering their visions, best practices, and nightmares, participants in Workshop III prepared themselves for the task of ‘painting’ a shared picture of integral development by ‘mixing colors’: balancing these elements into a mix that would fit integral development. Participants were also asked to identify matching development tasks (outreach) and virtues (inreach).

In most workshops, discussions focused mainly on the relationship between material (or ‘visible’) and immaterial (or ‘invisible’) dimensions of life and matching development tasks and virtues. Participants especially sought ways to describe the ‘invisible’ elements that make best practices successful—and, when lacking, or unrecognized, or uncritically left to operate, can turn development projects into ‘nightmares’. At the same time, they also recognized that the invisible aspects of human life need material support. As one participant put it, “In a situation where there are no material conditions, values cannot be upheld. To be able to live the good life, one needs resources.”

Naming the invisible

Food “should not be equated with ‘calories’.” It also has immaterial aspects (e.g., as expressed in ceremonies and rituals).

Physical abuse of young girls is a material reality. Behind such abuse may lie the motivating belief that females are less human than males. The belief is invisible, but associated with very visible—and in this case tragic—results.

Faith enables people to continue doing constructive work without seeing immediate results. In the absence of the visible, the invisible gives strength.

Reality is not only the actual, but also the possible.

In many southern countries, people’s social relations extend into the invisible world.

Not only the material results of a project matter, but also the dignity or “decency” of the process.

Workshop IV: Mixing Colors-2 (Wednesday, 11am-12.30pm)

The same mixed-tradition groups gathered again for the fourth workshop. The purpose of Workshop IV was to move *from* an understanding of the indivisible person (cf. Workshop III) *to* an articulation of matching development standards. Participants discussed the characteristics of integral development standards by means of another set of orienting twin concepts:

1. measuring – knowing
(regarding the transparency of development projects)
2. time – eternity
(regarding the pacing of development projects)
3. universality – particularity
(regarding the balance between universal rights and cultural diversity)

The conference background document (see appendix A) contains an explanation on these ‘twin concepts’.

Specifically, they asked themselves to what extent integral development programs are characterized by measuring and/or knowing, by time and/or eternity, and by universality and/or particularity. To visualize how they assessed the relative weights of these twin concepts, participants divided peanuts between buckets marked by concept. (These buckets were saved and later carried to the plenary session, to be combined into a collective ‘statistic’.) In most workshops, discussions focused mainly on the relationship between measuring and knowing (recast by some as ‘understanding’) in development work.

Joy and happiness must also be measured. This cannot be done by the indicators as we know them, but by participating, being there where it happens.

In addition to statistics, narratives should be part of evaluations.

In Kenya, the number of election meetings that take place without violence is measured to see if there is ‘progress’.

Through shifts in organisational staff, wisdom is lost and organisations have demonstrated not to be able to store or restore wisdom.

New ways are needed, based on TRUST.

3.3 The Plenary

After lunch on the last conference day, participants gathered in a plenary session to begin the process of ‘painting a picture’ of integral development, based on their insights from the previous sessions.

This process was simultaneously made visible through a ‘wall of ideas’, involving all the walls of the conference hall. The physical part of the digital wall of ideas consisted of the flipover sheets from Workshops III and IV, which had been mounted on the side and back walls. The digital part of the wall of ideas was projected on a large screen in front of the conference hall. Staff members had extracted its contents from the same flipover sheets, especially highlighting the tasks and virtues of integral development. These had been made into a series of Powerpoint slides: one idea per slide, alternated with previously selected images illustrating integral development. The wall of ideas was projected at a relaxed pace during both plenary sessions, for participants to contemplate during transition times.

Envisioning transformed development

Day chair Dr. Melba Maggay welcomed the participants and explained the session procedure. Day chair Dr. Louke van Wensveen then drew attention to the walls (real and digital) and to the buckets with peanuts, which had been collected from the various sessions of Workshop IV.

One of the session reporters, Christa van den Berg, proceeded to combine the contents of the buckets per ‘twin pair’: measuring and knowing, time and eternity, universality and particularity. The resulting ‘3-D bar chart’ clearly showed *a relative balance within each set of categories*.



Next, Louke Van Wensveen invited participants to turn to two neighbors and, considering both the wall of ideas and the ‘peanut bar chart’, share how each would now respond to the sentence on a handout that had been placed on their chairs: “Envisioning transformed development, I see...” After a few minutes of sharing, Van Wensveen asked participants to take a quiet moment and write their core insights on the hand-out. She also invited alternative forms of documentation, such as poetry or a drawing. These insights were collected, to be incorporated later in the in the ‘litany of development’. They also inform the analysis of this conference report.

Break-out Groups

Subsequently, participants split up into break-out groups of three categories: donors, partners, and academics.

During the next half hour, each group went through a three-step process:

1. Articulate the implications of integral development for your organization or profession, considering its particular mission and means.
2. Articulate any commitments you would be willing to make, personally, to help your organization or profession consider and act on these implications.
3. Select what the group would like to say publicly in the commitment ceremony, as gift and promise to the conference community.

Ceremony

At the end of the afternoon, everyone gathered again in the conference hall for the final plenary ceremony. This session was structured into five parts, moving from a reflective to a more festive mood: 1. Remembering; 2. Litany of Development; 3. Reflection; 4. Commitment ceremony; 5. Acknowledgments. The ceremony had been designed during the conference by a number of participants involved in the 'spiritual openings committee' of the conference.

1. Remembering

While music played and all were seated, three participants walked through the centre aisle to the front, carrying a burning candle and ringing a bell. This focused attention on their call to gather. Taking turns, each of the three invited everyone from his or her own tradition, Muslim, Hindu, and Christian.

One of the leaders then invited all participants to think of the faces of familiar people who are suffering. During the silence that followed, participants named the names of these people. Thus, all could be mindful of this very concrete suffering, the personal dimension behind much development work. At the same time, participants could feel that, as a community, they are strengthened through sharing.

2. Litany of Development

The three leaders then proceeded to read a selection of the participant insights that had been collected in the plenary session before the break-out groups. Taking turns, they introduced each new insight with the phrase: *Envisioning integral development, I see...* This created a mantra-like effect, allowing people to concentrate on each distinct contribution:

- Envisioning integral development, I see...
the widening of interspaces where people can meet and
smoke the peace pipe together.
- Envisioning integral development, I see...
respect for “the small”
(the importance of being unimportant).
- Envisioning integral development, I see...
communities that are aware of the interwovenness of the local and
the global in dealing with their problems and the solutions;
and that are enabled also to contribute at the global level.
- Envisioning integral development, I see...
an approach that recognizes the multidimensional nature of
the human being.
- Envisioning integral development, I see...
people in good relationship with God, each other and nature.
- Envisioning integral development, I see...
yin/yang.
- Envisioning integral development, I see...
a tree with a balance of fruits: health, bread, trust, house, joy, peace,
deeds. From the fruits you know the tree.
- Envisioning integral development, I see...
that it can be done!

The same readings were simultaneously projected as a slide show on the screen in front of the conference hall. Thus, the litany ‘painted a picture’ of transformed development: *a kaleidoscope pattern*, with shared elements repeatedly projected, from a great diversity of angles.

3. Reflection

Hans Brüning, director of ICCO, then offered an inspirational reflection.

4. Commitment ceremony

In a final and festive ceremony, led by day chair Dr. Louke Van Wensveen, participants articulated what ‘the big picture’ of integral development implies for the policies and programs of their organizations and professions. Reporting back from their breakout sessions, groups of donors, partners, and academics took turns sharing their learnings and commitments.



Louke Van Wensveen thanked each group for their contribution, inviting all other participants to show their moral support through a round of applause.

5. Acknowledgments

Concluding the ceremony, Prof. Dr. Anton Zijderveld, chairman of the KCRD Steering Committee, thanked all contributors to the program by offering them a token of appreciation. The ceremony ended with a festive African dance, led by Margaret Mwaniki, in which all participated.



Appendix: Conference background document Transforming Development

Exploring approaches to development from religious perspectives

Aim of the conference

To formulate a shared vision of integral development and its implications for both development theory and development practice.

Rationale

The present conference is a follow-up to the successful international conference “Religion: A Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation”, Soesterberg, September 2005. The main outcome of that conference was the perception that we need to deepen our understanding, and develop appropriate strategies, concerning the positive contribution of religion to human rights and development.

The aforementioned conference indicated three urgent needs, which will be central to the forthcoming conference. First, we *need to explore practical experiences* that illustrate how religious beliefs, practices and institutions play a role in community development. Second, we *need to reflect on the insights* proceeding from these experiences. The participants of ‘Soesterberg I’ deconstructed development as a Western, secular project and proposed a new paradigm, taking the indivisibility of the human person as a point of departure. A bottom-up approach, starting from people’s self-understanding, was advocated. Third, we *need to improve mutuality between donors and partners*. ‘Soesterberg I’ encouraged greater self-reflexivity of faith-based donor-NGO’s (framed in the expression “no outreach without inreach”). Religion should not simply become another tool or instrument in development practice; our assumptions and beliefs should be made explicit as well, if development is to be both integral and effective.

Approach

Building on the outcome of ‘Soesterberg I’, the forthcoming conference will explore the theoretical and practical implications of an integral understanding of development, incorporating both the material and the immaterial dimensions of human life.

The conference takes development practice as its starting point. It offers a platform for practitioners from faith-based and ‘humanist’ development organisations from across the globe to reflect, together with policy makers and academics, on the issues at hand.

The conference will follow the methodology of See - Learn - Act. Through the presentation of practical examples it expects to offer fresh insights into the multiple ways (both positive and negative) in which religion operates in people’s lives and how these may affect our understanding of development. There will be ample space to discuss and learn from best (and worst) practices of how religion and development interact in various religio-cultural contexts. Based on these practices, we will reflect on the implications for development theory, policy and practice. Finally, the consequences for the relationship between ‘donors’ and ‘partners’ will be explored.

As a tool to facilitate discussion about ‘integral development’ we propose to employ a number of conceptual twin-pairs.

- > *Measuring and Knowing*: much emphasis in current development discourse and practice is given to measuring results. This is a legitimate concern, but if taken too far it risks missing an appreciation of less quantifiable dimensions of human life and social change, such as embodied in local (‘indigenous’ or ‘traditional’) sources of wisdom and knowledge.
- > *Time and Eternity*: most development organisations are hard pressed to show quick and tangible results. Desired change is expected to be achieved according to planned interventions within a few years’ time. According to an integral understanding of development, however, it may be more appropriate to view human development as an organic process that follows its own inner logic and time, according to a variety of religio-cultural values and codes.
- > *Universality and Particularity*: while a global consensus is emerging on the universality of basic human rights, this is also questioned by a significant number of state and non-state actors with an appeal to particular religio-cultural contexts. Aside from mere power motives, this attitude is also motivated by fear and concern for loss of cultural values and cohesion in a globalizing world. A simple appeal to ‘universal human rights’ will not do. The challenge is how to respect religio-cultural diversity, without compromising on fundamental human rights.
- > *Individual and Community*: within Western and non-Western societies different perspectives exist on the relative importance of, and relationship between individual and community. A global consensus is emerging about human dignity as, a key concept to protect the individual against

undue pressures from community or state. How to apply and continuously adapt this to a variety of religio-cultural contexts is a key challenge of our time.

- > *Man and Nature*: Western notions of 'progress' and 'development' have for a long time neglected the intricate relationship between man and nature. Only after pressing environmental problems started to occur has 'sustainability' become an issue. This rather technical approach to ecology is still a long way from the intimate, often spiritual, relationship that many non-Western (indigenous) people experience with their natural environment. Whether religion can contribute to bridging these different understandings is a vital issue for this time.
- > *Material and Spiritual*: in Western societies (and development organisations) it is common to make a hard distinction between the material and spiritual realms of life. The latter are considered to be a strictly individual affair with no immediate relevance for the other dimensions of life. In non-Western societies, however, people commonly consider the visible and invisible world to be part of one indivisible reality that needs to be taken into account in development processes.
- > *Outreach and Inreach*: 'you have to practise what you preach', was the feedback to ICCO and Cordaid as faith-based donor-organisations at the previous Soesterberg conference. This is true for everyone who is involved in development work from a faith-based perspective. What are our own spiritual resources, as development workers and agencies, and how do we integrate them in our work?

Participants

Name	Country	(Guest) From
Abdilla, Mr. Muslimin	Indonesia	ICCO
Abrahams, Mr. Salie	Zuid-Afrika	ISS
Abubakar, Mr. Irfan	Indonesia	Cordaid
Akgündüz, Mr. Ahmed	Netherlands	IUR
Aksharananda, Swami	British Guinee/USA	IAB
Alam, Mr. Faridul	Bangladesh	ICCO
Amfo-Akonnor, Rev. Kofi	Ghana	ICCO
Atiemo, Rev. Abamfo	Ghana	ISS
Atilio Iullianelli, Mr. Jorge	Brasil	ICCO
Bakker, Mrs. Ineke	Netherlands	Oikos-dir.
Bartelink, Mrs. Brenda	Netherlands	Un. Groningen
Berenschot, Mr. Ward	Netherlands	Un. Amsterdam
Berg, Mrs. Christa van der	Netherlands	Reporter
Beuningen, Mr. Cor van	Netherlands	Cord-Socires
Bhondoe, Mr. Radj	Netherlands	Seva-KC
Bissumbhar, Mr. Nizaad	Netherlands	Seva
Boender, Mrs. Welmoet	Netherlands	Oikos-KC
Boer, Mr. Tjeerd de	Netherlands	Edukans
Bosch, Mr. Henk	Netherlands	ICCO
Broekhoven, Mrs. Lia van	Netherlands	Cordaid
Brüning, Mr. Hans	Netherlands	ICCO
Burgman, Mrs Hetty	Netherlands	Cordaid
Byler, Mrs. Carol	Colombia	ICCO
Carmi, Mrs. Nora	Palestine	ICCO
Cochrane, Prof. James	South Africa	ICCO
Abubakar, Mr. M. Dawood	Nigeria	ISS
Doorn, Mr. Wim van	Netherlands	ICCO
Duim, Mr. Feije	Netherlands	ICCO
Düran, Mr. Bünyamin	Netherlands	IUR
Dwarswaard, Mrs. Esther	Netherlands	Oikos-KC
Eggink, Mrs. Pauline	Netherlands	Reporter
Essen, Mr. Laurus van	Netherlands	Reporter
Feyen, Mrs. Ludy	Netherlands	Artist
Garcia Lobo, Mr. Nelson	Honduras	ICCO
Gedzie, Mr. Victor	Netherlands	ISS
Gilhuis, Mr. Henk	Netherlands	ICCO
Groot, Mr. Eelco de	Netherlands	Cordaid
Grotenhuis, Mr. René	Netherlands	Cordaid
Haar, Mrs. Gerrie ter	Netherlands	IAB
Hinfelaar, Mrs. Marja	Neth/Zambia	Cordaid
Hinfelaar, Fr. H.	Netherlands	Cordaid
Huynh, Mr. C. M.	Vietnam	Cordaid
Jong, Mr. Dennis de	Netherlands	KF-BuZa
Jonge, Mr. Jakob de	Netherlands	Buza

Jonker, Mr. Henk	Netherlands	Prisma
Karius, Mrs. Jennifer	Netherlands	Reporter
Khanna, Mr. Chander	India	Seva
Koç, Mr. Türal	Netherlands	IUR-KC
Kuijper, Mr. Piet	Netherlands	Cordaid-KC
Lap, Mr. Biem	Netherlands	Oikos
Leven, Mrs. Cokkie van 't	Netherlands	ICCO
Lubaale, Mr. Nicta	Uganda	ICCO
Maggay, Mrs. Melba Padilla	Phillippines	IAB
Malakal Dual Gar Wiy, Mr. Daniel	Sudan	Cordaid
McConkey, Mr. David	Nepal	ICCO
Michel, Fz. Thomas	Italie	Cordaid
Mueni Wanjama, Mrs. Lonah	Netherlands	ISS
Mulia, Mrs. Musdah	Indonesia	ICCO
Mwaniki, Mrs Margaret	Kenya	Cordaid
Mwaungulu, Fr. Robert	Malawi	Cordaid
Mwaura, Mrs. Philomena	Kenya	ISS
Nathan-Sharma, Pandit. L.	Jamaica	Seva
Nibar, Mr. Arwien	Suriname	Seva
Nielen, Mr. Jan	Netherlands	Cordaid
Omar, Mr. Rashied	South Africa	IAB
Padwick, Mr. John	UK	ICCO
Premchand, Mr. B	Suriname	Seva
Ranti-Apitulay, Mrs. Sylvana	Indonesia	ICCO
Sargado, Mr. Orson	Phillippines	Cordaid
Sarapung, Ms. E.	Indonesia	Cordaid
Singh, Mr. Sarjeet	India	Seva
Sital, Mr. Sradanand	Netherlands	Seva
Sukhram, Mr. Ruben	Netherlands	Seva
Tewari, Pandit Hardesh	Guyana	Seva
Tieleman, Mr. Henk	Netherlands	Univ. Utrecht
Troch, Mrs. Lieve	Netherlands	ICCO
Vanderkaa, Mrs. Manon	Netherlands	CMC
Ven, Mrs. Corrie v.d.	Netherlands	ICCO
Verbeek, Mr. Gerard	Netherlands	consultant/HKI
Verburg, Mr. Aart	Netherlands	HKI
Vidda, Mrs. Doris	Netherlands	ISS
Wel, Mrs. Lisette van der	Netherlands	ICCO-KC
Wensveen, Mrs. Louke van	Netherlands	Oikos-KC
Wepener, Mr. Cas	Zuid-Afrika	ISS
Wijzen, Mr. Frans	Netherlands	IAB
Wit, Mr. Hans de	Netherlands	Free Univ.
Yinda, Mrs. Helene	Geneve	ICCO
Zijderveld, Mr. Anton	Netherlands	KC chairman

Factsheet

Knowledge Centre Religion and Development

 www.religion-and-development.nl Or in Dutch: www.religie-en-ontwikkeling.nl

 kenniscentrum@religie-en-ontwikkeling.nl

 P.O. Box 19170, 3501 DD Utrecht, The Netherlands

 + 31 30 236 15 00 (Oikos)

Realization

Organizing committee

Piet Kuijper (Cordaid), Lisette van der Wel (ICCO), Radj Bhondoe (Seva),
Gerrie ter Haar (ISS), Louke van Wensveen (Oikos), Esther Dwarswaard (Oikos),
David Renkema (Oikos), Welmoet Boender (Oikos)

Text report

Louke van Wensveen

Photos

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