Background paper for the international conference
*Religion, Conflict, and Development
in Fragile States*
The Hague, 20 November 2008[i]

RELIGION IN FRAGILE STATES:
Which side up? Handle with care!

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INTRODUCTION

In fragile states, conflict resolution, reconciliation, poverty reduction, and democratisation are key aspects of development cooperation and peace building. Religion typically affects all of these efforts, whether as a source of concern or as a constructive force. In its efforts to improve intervention strategies, the Dutch development and peace building sector stands to benefit from more explicit and sustained efforts to understand the impact of religion in the development dynamics of fragile states.

Five major questions are relevant in this regard:

Major questions:
1. How can we characterize the role of religion in fragile states, and how does it compare with the role of religion in more stable contexts?
2. Which experiences do Dutch development and peace building professionals have with the risks and resources of religion in fragile states?
3. How can local religious agents contribute to development, democratisation and peace building in fragile states?
4. How can Dutch development and peace building professionals locally leverage the constructive potential of religious resources? How can Dutch development and peace building professionals locally reduce or contain the destructive potential of religious resources? Which pitfalls must be taken into account?
5. What are the main policy options for the Dutch development and peace building sector with respect to the risks and resources of religion in fragile states?

In a previous meeting, professionals from various Dutch NGOs have shared their situation-specific experiences with religious risks and resources in fragile states. This background paper goes into **questions 1 & *2,*** summarizing their perspectives and experiences.

During the conference 'Religion, Conflict, and Development in Fragile States', we focus at **question 3**. Development workers and civil society representatives from Sudan, Congo, the Great Lakes Region, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories and Israel will be interviewed about their experiences with religious agents in their regions. They will also share their views on how local religious agents might contribute to development, democratisation, and peace building.

In roundtable sessions with the guest speakers, NGO staff and directors, policy makers and policy advisors, and researchers will further discuss what religious agents can do in reinforcing the positive role of religion in these processes, and what they can do to clamp down on the negative role of religion. Together they will discuss different strategies, tools, preconditions and assumptions, related to **questions 4 & 5**.

Organisation
The conference is an initiative of the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development (Cordaid, ICCO, Seva Network Foundation, Oikos and Islamic University Rotterdam) and IKV Pax Christi.

The organisers of the conference support a balanced understanding of the role of religion in development cooperation and peace building. They aspire to take discussions beyond platitudes to careful, situation-specific observations and assessments. They treat religion as an integral agent in conflict and development, neither excluding nor separate from economic, social, political, environmental, and ethnic agents.

Background paper
This <u>background paper</u> focuses on questions 1 and 2. It presents input from the following sources:

- Insights gathered at an expert meeting with Dutch NGO professionals (23 June 2008)
- "*Een zaak van iedereen*", Minister Koenders, October 2007
- Chapter 5 "Religion and Conflict: strenghts and weaknesses of faith-based peacebuilding", *Handout Knowledge Forum Religion and Development Policy*, Spring 2008.
- Irma Specht, *Conflict Analysis Practical Tool to Analyse conflict in order to prioritise and strategise Conflict Transformation Programmes* (2008) ICCO & Kerk in Actie en Transition International
- Bart Klem, Pyt Douma, with Georg Frerks, Geert Gompelman and Stefan van Laar, *The Struggle after Combat. The Role of NGOs in DDR Processes: a Synthesis Study* (2008), commissioned by Cordaid
- Interview with Margret Verwijk in Tussenruimte vol. 2, June 2008

The information presented in this background document will function as starting point for the plenary and round table discussions during the international conference. It is written from a 'Dutch perspective'. The compiler does not intend to take up a particular stand.

1. ROLE OF RELIGION IN FRAGILE STATES

In order to discuss this question, we must first go into the concepts of 'fragile states' and 'religion'.

<u>What do we mean by 'fragile states'?</u>
In this background paper, we use the term 'fragile states' for those countries where there is overt or latent security and/or bad governance, and low levels of social and economic development (Van der Borgh 2008:1).
The state lacks the capacity or does not have the political will to let the state function and to guarantee public safety and public provisions.
 'Fragile states' are vulnerable for internal and external risks regarding the state's monopoly on violence, the internal legal order and public services.[ii] As such, it forms a (potential) danger for national and international stability. Bilateral or multilateral relations with such governance are not or hardly possible. (see Van der Borgh 2008)

In 2007, the Fund for Peace placed 32 countries on their *Failed States Index* (The Fund for Peace 2007). In his policy statement of October 2007, Minister Koenders identified nine fragile states: Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, Congo Dem. Rep., Guatemala, Kosovo VN Res. 1244, Pakistan, the Palestinian territories and Sudan.

Other used terms are
- *Weak (soft) states*: the government has severe difficulty in realising her own choices, particularly because of poor and inadequate government system; the real power lies at the informal networks. State bureaucracy still forms a means to exercise power; the non-governmental entities are not fully exercising power yet
- *Failing states*: The state is in a process in which it threatens to loose its power.
- *Failed states*: The state no longer has power.
- *Collapsed states*: State is absent; a total power vacuum

We notice that these definitions only deal with a (threatening) incapacity of the state.

Roughly, we detect the following reasons to pay attention to fragile states in the framework of development cooperation, peace building and/or foreign policy. First, fragile states form a risk for the well-being of the people in the country (health care, education, nutrition, safety and security, human rights, etc.). Second, fragile states are no (longer) partners in the *Millennium Development Goals* (yet), while the deprivations are most

severe in these countries (see Een zaak van iedereen, 2007: 7). A third incentive is formed by the concern that fragile states sooner or later will threaten the international legal order (terrorism, (drugs)criminality, etc.) (Een zaak van iedereen 2007: 7).

What do we mean by 'religion'?

We follow Gerrie ter Haar's description of *religion as a societal phenomenon*. This description focuses on the ways in which religious faith finds expression in everyday empirical reality in different parts of the world.

Ter Haar distinguishes between the following *religious resources*:

- *Spiritual experiences*: the religious experiences that people have in relation to the transcendent. 'The transcendent' is a collective term used to denote the supernatural world of the divine, spirits, gods, etc. Religious experiences may lay the foundation for individual and collective transformations.
- *Religious ideas*: visions of the cosmos, the world, life, nature, evil, the sacred, and virtues and values which give direction to human actions. These visions, virtues and values may be expressed through stories, and may also be concretised in tenets and rules.
- *Religious organisations*: religious movements, communities and organisations; their leaders and the networks within which they work together [also called *religious agents*].
- *Religious practices*: the [ritual] actions, customs, places and objects that connect the non-empirically-determined reality with the reality that is empirically determined.

Some terminology

In literature and public debate the concept of *religious organisation* or *religious agent* can be used in various ways:

Religious organisation: This can be a *religious institution*, like a church or mosque or a church organisation. This can also be a *faith-based non-governmental organisations* or *faith-based civil society organisation.*

Faith-based agents can be *religious leaders* or *faith-based NGO workers.*

FBO= faith-based organization: has as basic characteristics 1) link with other religious groups, including financial links; 2) reference to one or more religious or spiritual traditions in the mission statement; 3) religion as criteria in the selection of employees; 4) policy formation on the basis of religious and/or spiritual values. Churches, mosques and temples fall under this definition (Van Essen 2006:7).

What makes religion in fragile states special?

In general we can say that most people in developing countries, as well as in so-called fragile states, have strong religious convictions. Case studies show how belief in an invisible world ultimately influences the visible world around us (Handout p.3).[iii] Development cooperation and peace building should take appropriate account of this (Handout p.4). Furthermore, many of the local implementing partners of the Dutch NGOs and multilateral organisations have a religious background. This is also the case in fragile states.

What then, makes religion in fragile states special?

- *Religious organisations* often appear to be the only institutions who are capable of continuing providing certain basis provisions or basis institutions (such as health care, education and forms of social community) where the state has failed in providing these basic institutions.
- Religion (*religious ideas* and *religious organisations*) can be part of the conflict, but also part of the solution.
- Thus, in a fragile state's context, it is relevant to consider how *religious organisations* can help prevent conflict and build peace.

- It is equally important to analyse how *religious organisations* are involved in the conflict.
- Religious values, norms and virtues can be motors for change and form strong social capital to reach people who are very difficult to reach by 'outsiders'. It can be relevant to be open for the partner's *religious ideas* and *religious practices*.

This urges us to pay attention to religion in this specific context of the fragile states.
We must hereby take into account at least the following points:

- While paying necessary attention to the role of religion, we must realize that identifying the role of religion has consequences. What these consequences are, depends (amongst others) from the phase in which the fragile state resides. At random order, different phases of conflict are: pre-escalation, conflict, transition, transformation, reconciliation.
- While paying attention to religion, we note that it is important not to essentialise religion. Religion can often not be separated from economic, social, ethnic and political agents.
- We observe that Dutch NGOs and a relevant policy note of Minister Koenders are open and willing to (find ways to) connect to various agents in civil society. In their formulations, faith-based agents, religious organisations, faith-based national NGOs and religious leaders are often not excluded. But they are often not specifically mentioned either.
- It is relevant to have contextual knowledge about the role of religion on the one hand, and a more general 'eye for religion' on the other hand.

2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES OF DUTCH NGOS WITH RELIGION

In this section, we illustrate how NGO professionals view the role of religion in development and peace building. These staff perspectives are based on field experience , with special emphasis on Afghanistan, the Balkan, Palestine and Israel, Congo, Burundi, Sudan and Aceh. We also provide an analysis of Een zaak van *iedereen*, a pertinent policy statement *by Minister Koenders (2007).*

Perspectives and experiences of Dutch NGO staff
Many NGO professionals have come across religion as an agent affecting development, democratisation, and peace building. Their evaluation of the agent religion varies, depending on the characteristics of specific conflicts, regions, and their own organisations.

At a meeting of 21 NGO staff members on 23 June, 2008, the following perspectives and observations emerged:

1. Religions, religious institutions, and religious organisations are increasingly important as actual or potential players in fragile states. Based on their legacy of invoking social trust, religious agents are often the only ones capable of securing some social cohesion. At the same time, NGO professionals also report abuses by religious agents. Ethnic, political and religious identity are often interrelated. Context analyses can help to identify these connections.

2. Simply *mentioning* the role of religion in a fragile state may have consequences, both negative and positive. NGO professionals therefore find that they require clear strategies for *how* they will discuss religion and with *whom. Such strategies also need to be sensitive to the phase of any local conflict* (pre-escalation, conflict, transformation or reconciliation). NGO strategies can differ in this regard, partially due to differing organizational missions, identities, structures, and antenna's for the factor religion.

3. In fragile states, religion can play significantly different roles at macro-, meso-, and microlevels. NGO professionals strongly emphasise the importance of context analyses that show which religious agents merit attention at which levels.

4. From the perspective of development work and peace building, religious agents do not always play a positive role in fragile states. For example, churches can themselves be tied up in ethnic and political conflicts. Where new religious movements arise, they can weaken the authority of established institutions and give rise to intra-religious conflict. Religious leaders may also be corrupt. In processes of reconciliation, religious agents may deny their own negative role and shy away from dealing with its consequences.

5. In processes of reconciliation and transition, religious leaders and religious values can also reinforce the peace process.
   a. The authors of "Struggle for Combat" provide a small but telling example: In the Sierra Leonean case, [national, service-providing] NGOs supported traditional healing ceremonies aimed at forgiving perpetrators of violence and clearing the ground for their return to the community (Klem et al. 2008:33).

6. Religion should not be made more important than it is. Religious agents usually operate within a complex set of other agents and influences.

7. Conflict can be reinforced by paying (too) much attention to religion. In such cases, an NGO's silence about religion may reflect wisdom. Such strategic silence should be distinguished from silence based on a) ignorance about religion (lack of knowledge); b) misconceptions about religion (deficient knowledge); c) an 'allergic reaction' to religion (unprofessional emotion); or d) unsubstantiated fears of conflict escalation due to religion (unexamined emotion).
   a. In Liberia, for example, partner NGOs of ICCO strongly differ in opinion whether it is wise to point at Christians dominance over Muslims as a source of conflict.

8. In fragile states, democratisation typically implies 'importing' a *Western* model of governance to build peace. NGO professionals find that, at the community level, the effectiveness of democratisation efforts depends on their ability to work with local agents of change. These may be religious leaders, who can garner the trust of their communities and help people to see the benefits of democratic governance.

9. In fragile states, effective provision of basic services may similarly depend on the ability of NGO professionals to cooperate with religious leaders,

10. Dutch faith-based NGOs can play a facilitating role in mobilizing and bringing together religious agents in fragile states. These NGOs have local religious networks with active channels of communication. Their own religious identities are also an asset when it comes to making new connections, communicating with religious agents, and creating political room for a focus on dissidents. In such situations, faith-based NGOs can significantly complement the necessarily secular work of the Directorate-General of International Cooperation (DGIS). For example, where the state is incapable of inducing local churches and Christian organizations to take up leadership responsibilities, faith-based NGOs may be able to do so. (Some NGO professionals noted that impartiality can usually not be maintained in such situations.)

11. The decision to cooperate with a particular local religious agent does not imply a policy choice to favour only adherents of that religion. Through the channels of specific religious organisations, Dutch NGOs may be better able to help local people. In practice, Dutch NGOs tend to give priority to organisations that can deliver high quality projects with good results, irrespective of their religious affiliation.

12. Religious communities do not always have centralized leadership and administrative structures (cf. Pentecostals, Charismatics, Evangelicals, independent African churches, and some Islamic communities). This can be an impediment for cooperation. For example, Dutch NGOs cannot enter into formal contracts with decentralized religious communities. Consequently,
    a. Pentecostals, Charismatics, Evangelicals, and independent African churches tend to become 'blind spots' for development workers in Central Africa;
    b. Local Chiefs, who may combine religious with legal authority, are also easily overlooked by development workers in Central Africa.

13. In post-conflict situations, Dutch NGOs must be careful not to ignore religious organisations that ensured and provided basic social services in prior periods of conflict. Even when the state should begin to take over responsibilities, NGOs do well to recognize how much credit religious agents may have built up among the population by helping out in extremely difficult times. While many other structures disappeared in the turmoil, these organisations survived for a reason. Ignoring them in the process of social reconstruction can spark tensions. At the same time, as partners in peace building and development cooperation, Dutch NGOs must also keep a critical eye on the activities and positions of these organisations.

14. Politics and religion can be closely related.

Analysis of policy statement "Een zaak van iedereen" ("Everyone's Business")
In his policy statement "*Een zaak van iedereen*" of October 2007, Minister Koenders observes with regard to religion:

> "Confrontation, especially in the form of religious polarisation, does not match well with striving for development. Fear and distrust are fed by increasing polarisation. Knowledge of other cultures and religions opens possibilities for decreasing fear and distrust. Concrete cooperation further enlarges these opportunities. Development cooperation can clearly play a role in improving the protection of human rights and in advancing democracy by stimulating openness towards more moderate forces, apart from combating and suppressing [radical religious elements]" (Koenders 2007:8, translation WB).

In this policy statement, Minister Koenders does not explicitly mention the role of religion in fragile states. However, we see three moments where he leaves open the possibility that religious agents may play a (positive) role.

First, Minister Koenders mentions the value of dialogue with social organisations that 'represent the voice of the weak'. In this context he suggests the option of forming new coalitions with—amongst others—civil society[iv] (2007:2). While Koenders does not explicitly mention religious organisations or leaders, he does not exclude them either.[v]

Second, Minister Koenders focuses on the relationships of the Dutch government (through various ministries) with the governments and politicians of fragile states. Because such governments are often weak and only partially representative, Koenders emphasizes repeatedly that bilateral contacts between governments are insufficient for effective development cooperation in fragile states. He observes that one has to listen to all sections of society. Koenders also wants more emphasis on an integrated approach to containing conflicts (3-D approach) (Koenders 2007:4). He often observes that the voices of social organisations and civil society must be heard. They themselves, and not their donors, have to set priorities. Again, while Koenders does not explicitly mention the role of religious organisations in this context, they do belong to civil society and can be assumed to fall within the intended range of the policy statement.

And third, the Minister does not enter into the meaning of religion can have in a society, such as the appeal of a religious tradition to people regarding justice, solidarity or care.

In an interview in *Tussenruimte* (vol. 2, June 2008), Margret Verwijk, policy worker at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explains how the Dutch government not only cooperates with the government of a fragile state as potential partner, but often also with religious partners, who play an important role as NGOs in the provision of basic needs when a government is not yet functioning sufficiently. "We do not distinguish between regular or religious organisations, but look at the quality of the proposals. The suggested activities must be in line with our policy. If this is the case, and they are exercising priorities in our policy, religion does not have to be an obstacle."

3. POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF RELIGIOUS AGENTS IN FRAGILE STATES TO DEVELOPMENT, DEMOCRATISATION AND PEACE BUILDING

Question 3 will be at the core of the conference. In what ways can religious agents in fragile states positively contribute to development, democratisation and peace building?

As background information, we summarise a synthesis study regarding this question published in the Handout Knowledge Forum Religion and Development Policy, Spring 2008.

A study conducted by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations at Clingendael divides faith-based peace building agents into five groups: *active promoters, constrained contributors, silent supporters, potential spoilers* and *active spoilers* (Handout p.42).[vi] According to this and other studies conducted by Clingendael, faith-based agents can provide both social and moral/spiritual assets, making them potential contributors to conflict prevention and peace building activities (Handout p.42). The studies mention a number of reasons:

- Most faith-based agents have a long history of involvement in the societies they serve.
- Faith-based agents have wide networks in the regions they serve and are able to use them to mobilise large numbers of people.
- Faith-based agents appear not to confine their attention to religious conflicts, nor are they concerned only with coreligionists. Faith-based and secular peace building [initiatives] can be interrelated and complementary.
- Faith-based peace building is not (necessarily) confined to 'religious moderates', but extends to 'religious conservatives' as well. According to one of the 'Clingendael-studies', individual leaders of faith-based organisations are most likely to encourage change.
- Multi-faith agents can be suitable for organising interfaith dialogue.
- Faith based agents are often involved in advocacy.

Apart from these *social assets*, faith-based agents might have *moral and spiritual assets*. The following are listed in chapter 5 of the Handout of the Knowledge Forum Religion and Development Policy (pp. 41-47):

- Faith connects people in search of a situation in which superior values (like peace and human rights) are respected.
- Faith-based agents have a certain moral and spiritual authority. Potentially and ideally they have the leeway to broker relations and build peace that political leaders often lack.
- Faith based agents might organise peace building activities that include encouraging people to change their behaviour or perceptions. "Faith-based agents can sometimes challenge traditional perceptions and introduce new ways of thinking" (Handout p.43). They might provide emotional, psychological and spiritual support to communities and individuals affected by war.

- They *spread ideas* about peace, justice and development; they *mobilise* their coreligionists and others for peace building; they *mediate* between conflicting parties, and they *connect* coreligionists and others worldwide.

These positive assets and active contributions do not dispel that faith-based agents (can) have "weaknesses" that can prevent them from cooperating effectively in peace building. "These weaknesses sometimes relate to problems endemic to faith-based agents and sometimes to problems caused by their political connections" (Handout p. 43).

- Proselytism (actual or perceived). This might undermine their peace building efforts.
- Programs of faith-based agents often lack a focus on results, particularly shorter-term deliverables.
- Faith-based agents are often less professional than other peace building agents. This means, according to one of the studies that their efforts cannot serve as a substitute for political and diplomatic peace building efforts.[vii]
- Muslim peace building agents appear to be less visible in international relations than Christian and multi-faith agents, because they are "less developed".
- "Faith-based agents might have strong ties to political movements or governments". When religion is part of the political power game, "faith-based agents, like the rest of civil society, have to struggle within a highly restrictive environment imposed by government control"
- We can add to this that faith-based agents (like 'the Church') can be depraved by existing, conflictuous political power relations.
- "Certain religions may be so closely connected with certain ethnic groups that they loose their credibility among members of other ethnic groups." This might be "a major risk".
- "As to the international church-related organisations, their desire for dialogue can prevent them from adopting clear-cut positions on war atrocities and dialogue can be misused".

As a 'warning' these studies come up with the following:

- "When conflicts arise, religious communities tend to follow political initiatives, and not vice versa. Every issue perceived as religious is somehow connected with politics. Many observers argue that intra-faith dialogue must not be allowed to become a substitute for justice achieved via political means. If faith-based agents become too involved in dialogue on political issues, it may undermine respect and support for them among their followers" (Handout p.44).

Another 'warning' or recommendation is given in a study on the role of religion in the conflict in the Balkans (Van Hal and Van den Berg 2007):

- "The Balkan study calls on faith-based actors to become more self-critical. All the actors involved in a conflict should evaluate their own actions and interventions and announce their findings publicly. The search for truth is also a task for religious leaders and their communities. The 'Middle East study' points out that, where religion and politics are almost indistinguishable, human rights should be a topic for dialogue within and between religious communities."

4. PITFALLS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY DUTCH AGENTS

So far, several 'pitfalls' have been detected by Dutch NGO staff and researchers when dealing with religion and religious agents in fragile states. We list them here, in order to function as background information to the round table discussions during the conference.

At the meeting of 21 NGO staff members at 23 June 2008 the following visions came up:
- Different agents can think very differently about the role of (their) religion in the conflict.
  - It is important to know in what phase the conflict resides;

- o It is important to know who calls upon the role of religion;
- o It is important to know who advises the NGO on religious matters and who explains the situation regarding religion to them.

- Religion can play very different roles at the macro-, meso-, and micro level.

- Do not make religion more important than it actually is:
  - o Do not reinforce the conflict by paying too much or too openly attention to religion;
  - o In many regions the role of the church should not be overestimated.

- It is wise to avoid making generalisations about religions: in general, religious traditions are often less monolithic than outsiders think (Handout p.10).

- Making visible the role of religious leaders, has implications for their possibilities and position within difficult and tensed political relations.

- One cannot just ignore religious organisations (in one's network).

- Ethnic, political and religious identity are often intertwined. NGOs and government have to take this into account when choosing their alliances.

- Do not 'instrumentalise' religion as a tool for implementing one's own agenda, nor the agenda of the most powerful (religious) group in a fragile state or society.

- It is better to talk about fragile societies, instead of fragile states.
  - o An etatistic approach of the Dutch government might prevent a view on the whole of society and a 'whole of agents approach'.

- The analysis of civil society should include religious agents.
  - o The authors of the DDR analysis warn: "Caution must be exercised against an overly Western conception of civil society based on egalitarian, liberal state models that prevail in the Western world. Foreign agents often do not find any organisations that represent the civil society in Western eyes, or 'they find groups that claim this label, mirroring Western society. But these groups are far from covering the range of different modalities of collective organization, and may have difficulty in establishing links with other forms of existing arrangements, especially at community level' (Pouligny 2006:68)" . Furthermore the authors state that "It is generally a mistake to assume that there is no meaningful civil society in a post-conflict country, however". Here the authors explicitly refer to village councils (e.g. the Afghan *shuras*), churches (e.g. in Sierra Leone and the DRC) and other local organisations that often continue to perform (Struggle after Combat 2008:18 p.18).

- The religious identity of a Dutch NGO or civil society organisation might increase possibilities to connect to people and organisations, but it is hardly impossible to remain 'neutral'.

Researchers mention the following pitfalls that Dutch agents should bear in mind:
- "When conflicts arise, religious communities tend to follow political initiatives, and not vice versa. Every issue perceived as religious is somehow connected with politics. Many observers argue that intra-faith dialogue must not be allowed to become a substitute for justice achieved via political means. If faith-based agents become too involved in dialogue on political issues, it may undermine respect and support for them among their followers." (Handout p.44)

- "Even though religious leaders adopt political positions, they are not politicians, and they need to be addressed as such". This is a recommendation to diplomats. That is why "IGOs and foreign missions need to gather information on how religion affects communities: not only the facts and figures, but also the 'language' of religion.

- "Traditions, culture and religion must never be used as excuses for violating human rights", Interview with Margret Verwijk in Tussenruimte vol. 2, June 2008.

An illustration to the observation Dutch agents do not exclude faith-based agents, religious organisations, faith-based national NGOs and religious leaders in their formulations -but that they are often not specifically mentioned either:

In their recent report on DDR implementation [a specific program of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of ex-combatants in fragile states in transition and transformation], the authors leave out religious organisations as focus of their research (p.18). They motivate this decision by stating that: "Whether these organizations are present and in what form strongly depends on the context and culture at stake" (p.18). The report does not go into (possible) faith-based identities of NGOs working in fragile states. The question remains if they leave this out deliberately, focussing on political, economic and social agents, or if it is possibly a 'blind spot'.

The researchers do mention added value of local NGOs because of a –claimed- experience with, for example, community mobilisation and empowerment, trust relationships, cultural sensitivity and mechanisms for consultation and participation. As an example they tell how in the Sierra Leonean case, NGOs supported traditional healing ceremonies aimed at forgiving perpetrators of violence and clearing the ground for their return tot the community (2008:33).

Strikingly, the researchers did not find any involvement of national and local NGOs in their role as a representative of society and a counterweight to the state in the three case studies they carried out. The NGOs had no influence to speak of on the design of the programme. Moreover, no substantive evidence was found of consultation of these NGOs with civil society or significant customisation towards local circumstances or requirements. "They had limited room and made limited efforts to consult with beneficiaries and communities, even though it was often clear that there were problems with standards set and approaches adopted" (Struggle for Combat 2008:38). The researchers see this as one of the main weaknesses identified in the ways NGOs continued to DDR.

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5. POLICY OPTIONS

What are the main policy options of Dutch (faith-inspired or general) NGOs and the Dutch (secular) government regarding religious agents?
To be able to choose appropriate policy strategies, context analysis appears to be crucial. In the meeting prior to the conference, much emphasis has been put at the importance of context analysis that includes (ample) attention for religion.
There are already several instruments used by government and non-governmental organisations to analyse the contextual role of religion. The main tool of the government is formed by the SCAGA and the SAF instruments. In October 2008, the Peace and Stabilization Unit (PSU) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided us with some factual information about the SCAGA en SAF instruments.
We first summarise these main tools. Then we proceed to a few policy recommendations that resulted from the first round of consultations.

SCAGA and SAF (governmental instruments)

In partner-countries with a fragile-country profile, the security element is added to the analysis. While the regular *SCAGA*'s main goal is to design strategic responses towards good governance, in fragile situations its focus is to provide a more complete analysis of root causes of fragility, including governance, security and socio-economic actors. It also suggests possible strategies for interventions on the different terrains.

Religion is included in both instruments: the SCAGA instrument focuses on all actors in a country that affect, or may affect political processes in a country, or that play a big role in its society. Religion is usually one such actor and therefore is included in the analysis. As such it is discussed as either an impediment (where extremists stage violent actions, or enforce strict social laws) or a boon (by providing a platform for bringing people together) to development (information provided by PSU).

The same counts for the *SAF*, which analyses important security trends in Fragile States. While its focus is on security, its overall aim is to design integrated responses for security, governance and development. The instrument maps and analyses the roles of all important political agents in a country, some of which may very well be religious organisations. Also in regarding demographics, it will look at any societal divisions, including those on a religious basis (information provided by PSU).

Conflict Transformation Practical Tool (non-governmental instruments)
ICCO and Kerk in Actie advise that a solid conflict analysis should guide the Conflict Transformation (CT) interventions (2008: 6). As part of their Conflict Transformation focuses, ICCO & Kerk in Actie consider it important to assess the role of religion as part of the underlying structures of specific conflicts. "On this basis, a country-specific CT strategy, mobilizing religious capital with potential to contribute to positive social change, while reducing the negative potential of religious actors and beliefs that might spoil or hinder social change and peace, can be build." (2008: 6) In their practical tool to analyse conflict in order to prioritise and strategise Conflict Transformation Programmes, the following question is included: *How are the various religious leaders and religious organizations reducing or fuelling conflict? What is the influence of religious beliefs on people's attitudes, behaviour and relationships? What place does religion have in the underlying structures of the conflict?* (2008: 19).

Some non-governmental sources are critical in their opinions about the government's focus on and experiences with religious agents and the role of religion differ in various sources. A study carried out by IKV Pax Christi and BBO points out that IGOs and diplomats often know little about the position and role of religion in communities. "Diplomats, like politicians, often underestimate the influence of religious leaders and are unaware of the deeply rooted dynamics that motivate religious communities." (Handout p. 45)[viii] The researchers recommend that IGOs and foreign missions need to gather information on how religion affects communities: not only the facts and figures, but also the 'language' of religion (Handout p. 46).

A few policy recommendations after the first consultation round:
Recommendations done in the meeting of 21 NGO staff members (see also 'pitfalls' listed above):
- Improve processes of consultation, cooperation and knowledge sharing between NGOs and Dutch diplomatic posts;
- Make 'religion' part of the Stability Assessment Frameworks;
- Talk about fragile societies instead of fragile states;

Recommendations from several case studies listed in the Handout, chapter 5 on religion and conflict:
- *Active cooperation*: donors should address the potential of faith-based peace building when devising policies for promoting peace, security, and stability, and cooperate more closely

- Donors should examine the role of faith-based agents in *stability assessment frameworks* and context analyses
- "International actors could actively promote a more enabling, less restrictive, political environment, so that faith-based actors will enjoy greater freedom to develop their activities." (handout p.45)
- *Supporting reconciliation efforts* among the followers of a faith-based actor, in order to pave the way to reach out to others.
- *Recognising less visible, less measurable results*
- "While governments are best placed for preparing and concluding official peace agreements, faith-based agents can play a very useful role in the parallel process of reconciliation and long-term stabilisation. This division of tasks reduces the impact of the weaknesses of faith-based agents and fully recognises their strengths." (Handout p. 45)
- *Demanding international attention.* "Governments should draw international attention (in the EU, OECD-DAC, OSCE, and UN) to the contributions of faith-based agents. They should also sensitise and train their foreign missions to include faith-based peace building in their annual and multi-annual plans" (Handout p. 45).
- *Rebuilding places of worship* merits attention (Handout p.46).

The organisers wish you an inspiring conference

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[i] Text: Welmoet Boender, Knowledge Centre Religion and Development.

[ii] There is no consensus among policy makers, international organizations, or scholars about how to define fragility. Moreover, governments of so called fragile states do not always appreciate to be labelled as such (Van der Borgh 2008:1).

[iii] See for case studies Handout "The Knowledge Forum for Religion and Development Policy. Making Room for Religion in Development Policy", 2008.

[iv] "Het maatschappelijk middenveld."

[v] He explicitly recognises that development cooperation should never disconnect itself from the specific circumstances of each individual country or region. The 'searchers' in the field should reach the policy makers at the top even better then is the case now (2007:11). He regards strategic cooperation most urgent regarding topics that demand a clear mentality change, like sexual and reproductive health and rights. A constructive dialogue with dissenters [andersgezinden] is a prerequisite –without diluting the starting points that are also internationally decided on (Koenders 2007:15). An increasing number of bilateral donors, including the Netherlands, recognises the need to work more on safety and development in fragile states. Multilateral frameworks and cooperation with other partners are crucial here. Cooperation with social partners must be sought on the pretext of 'learn from each other' (Koenders 2007:17). Ownership in the specific country is crucial. When a government is weak, ownership of the government is not always sufficient. Active involvement must be sought in the whole of society (2007:19). In the sectoral approach all attention was focused on a policy dialogue with the government about budgeting, planning and control at a national level.

[vi] *Stuck in Change – Faith-Based Peacebuilding in Sudan's Transition*, by Ulrich Mans and Osman Mohammed Osman Ali, September 2006.

[vii] *Religion during the Conflict in the Balkans: the Role of Religious Leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Albert van Hal and Dion van den Berg, 2007.

[viii] *Religion during the Conflict in the Balkans: the Role of Religious Leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Albert van Hal (BBO) and Dion van den Berg (IKV Pax Christi), 2007.