

Debating Faith and Development

The Tony Blair Faith Foundation, DFID, Islamic Relief, World Vision and Oxfam are working together to host 6 groundbreaking seminars to discuss the new perspectives emerging on Faith and Development.



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In a recent Gallup poll, 82% of those surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa said their most trusted institution was a religious organisation (Gallup 2008).

In Mozambique Reverend Herminio describes the interfaith training around Malaria that begins with a Muslim prayer and ends with a Christian blessing but most importantly equips faith leaders to teach their congregations about malaria control, "The trainers are the same Imams and Pastors that people trust, we are not imported from outside, we cannot keep quiet about this, when our communities are dying. If we have the knowledge we have to share it." It is stories and statistics like these that are encouraging the development community to look more and more at the potential of faith communities.

"Faith communities" (faith based organisations, faith communities and religious leaders) are seen as development's missing link reaching those that governments and NGOs can't. But what is the role of these faith communities? Do they have a justifiable role at the 'development table'? And how effective can they be? This series is designed to answer some of these tough questions.



On the 7th of September Tony Blair gave the key note address on why faith matters for development, chaired by Karen Armstrong.

The next 5 seminars will explore the role faith communities play in conflict resolution, as healthcare and education service providers, installing ethics in the marketplace and as stewards of the environment.

Douglas Alexander, Tariq Ramadan, Ken Costa and senior advisor to the World Bank Katherine Marshall will be joining a prestigious line up of academics, development workers, journalists, and government, business and faith leaders. The series ends with a closing keynote from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams chaired by Rabbi David Rosen. We are incredibly excited to have such an inspirational line up discussing some of the huge questions facing policy makers as they grapple with an increasingly interconnected world. This debate is not taking place in the abstract but in front of the people carrying out these ideas on the ground and making policy in government and we hope will produce real outcomes. If you would like to learn more visit our WordPress blog [here](#).



The Guardian is hosting the discussion online on 'Comment is free: belief', where you can find edited versions of the speeches and lively discussion about them, [click here to take part](#).

Programme of events

Wednesday 30 September Faith in the Marketplace?

Tuesday 6 October Poverty & Conflict: Faith as a Solution or Cause?

Tuesday 20 October Health and Education - Where Faith Fits?

Wednesday 4 November Towards a Sustainable Environment: What Can Faith Teach Us?

Thursday 12 November Closing keynote address from The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams.

If you are interested in attending any of these events please visit the RSA website at <http://www.thersa.org/events/our-events>

● LATEST NEWS FROM THE FOUNDATION

Keeping Faith in Development

On the same day that Tony Blair launched the Faith and Development seminar series in the UK with Dfid, Islamic Relief, World Vision and Oxfam, a new report provided further evidence of how faith-based organisations can work more effectively across the religious divide.

Keeping Faith in Development, a report published on 7th September by the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths, Cambridge, www.woolfinstitute.cam.ac.uk, makes a number of recommendations including calling for the establishment of

- advisory groups with representatives from different faith communities,

- multi-faith literacy educational programmes for staff working in aid organisations
- a faith-based humanitarian aid resources network with representatives from the faith-based organisations.

Tony Blair said: "The report shows that faith organisations have particularly important reach because they represent, and are respected by, their faith community, giving extra credibility with local religious communities on the ground which can facilitate their work."

The report focuses on the extensive reach of agencies such as Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and World Jewish Relief in the delivery of aid. Trusted by their respective religious communities, such agencies are supported by religious leaders giving them extra credibility in their work and setting them apart from their secular counterparts.

On the other hand they have to face specific challenges such as local politics, and need to carefully manage the risks of appearing to represent one faith group. The baggage of historical memory, such as a history of persecution and forced-conversion, may linger in a faith community's collective memory, leading to suspicion towards another faith organisation.

Dr Ed Kessler, Director of the [Woolf Institute](#), said: "Knowledge of and sensitivity to interfaith issues are vital in the delivery of humanitarian aid in the world today. By pooling the experience, leading religious charities will be better equipped to fulfil their goals."

Daleep Mukarji, director of Christian Aid, stated that: "Global poverty is not a Christian issue, but a human one, and ending it is not simply a Christian obligation, but a universal one. This report looks forward to what we might do together in the future."