

A Luxembourg government perspective on faith in partnership

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The Luxembourg government works closely with civil society organisations and multilateral agencies in order to improve the living conditions of populations affected by natural disasters or conflicts and to prevent and mitigate the effects of humanitarian crises. Neither the religious identity of these agencies nor the beliefs or values of those being assisted determine the eligibility of its partners.

There is, however, a clear set of requirements governing the selection of partners. Firstly, the decision-making processes of eligible NGOs must be fully needs oriented. This means that the organisation, together with its local partners, must remain neutral and impartial in identifying vulnerabilities and selecting communities. Secondly, it is a priority for Luxembourg to reach the most vulnerable communities and to fund humanitarian action predominantly in protracted and ‘forgotten’ crises. Partners may be chosen based on their special access capacity or on their particular know-how in working in complex environments. Thirdly, the preferred partners are organisations with a positive track record, showing high standards of accountability and solid operational structures.

While Luxembourg is fully aware of the differences that exist between faith-based and secular discourses in humanitarianism and of the prevailing criticism towards certain FBOs frequently accused of

proselytism, it tries not to lose sight of the operational strengths of its partners. FBOs are often known to be well embedded in local contexts and are therefore well positioned to understand local dynamics and cultural specificities, which can help to provide access to communities. Moreover, because of its global presence and influence, religion can be an important medium through which the psychosocial wellbeing of disaster-hit populations can be improved. In certain contexts, for example, using familiar religious references when providing counselling may prove beneficial in contributing to the restoration of hope and in helping communities to overcome trauma.

And yet, while taking into account these potential advantages, the Luxembourg government pays particular attention to the extent to which partner organisations adhere to the humanitarian principles as laid out in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations in Disaster Relief and in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. International humanitarian law and human rights law also reject any kind of favouritism and discrimination based on faith, as well as any form of proselytism potentially distorting a neutral needs-based approach. One of the responsibilities of Luxembourg’s humanitarian aid desk is therefore to scrutinise the work done by partner NGOs – not only FBOs – in terms of their neutrality and impartiality.

International research suggests that staff employed by FBOs tend to have professional backgrounds which are increasingly similar to those employed by non-faith organisations,¹ as a consequence of the professionalisation of the humanitarian sector. If this trend towards mainstreaming organisational cultures, a common set of principles and a converging humanitarian language prevails, the divide between faith-based and secular

organisations may one day become obsolete. This could well be to the benefit of people in need.

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1. <http://mr31.qeh.ox.ac.uk/events/faith-based-humanitarianism/FaithBasedHumanitarianismReport.pdf>, p.2