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FASTENOPFER

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Guidance for readers

The length of this policy statement reflects the complexity of the subject-matter. A shorter version would be to the detriment of its readability, depth and thoroughness. However, since the policy statement has a modular structure, individual sections can be consulted as necessary. Chapters 2 and 3 offer a more in-depth examination of thematic areas, while methodological suggestions can be found in chapter 4. Readers who are in a particular hurry should read chapters 1 and 6, while an introduction to the historical context and alternative concepts of development are set out in the Annexe (chapter 8).

And a final comment: Acquiring greater cultural sensitivity should be seen as a process rather than a state to be achieved. That is why, in addition to the conceptual work, there is also a need for continuous involvement in practice – whether in the form of intervision and supervision, in peer groups, or in further training sessions.

1 Introduction

‘Every person is a another country.’

from Tanzania

Fastenopfer has addressed the issues of *Religion and Culture* since its foundation, aware that development cooperation – with church or secular partners – never occurs in a vacuum. The *Fastenopfer* Mission Statement refers to this understanding of cultural sensitivity: ‘We respect the diversity of persons, cultures and religions.’¹ As early as in 2003, the Ecumenical Lenten Campaign with its focus on ‘Understanding creates change’ pointed to the inter-religious and intercultural dimension of our work. However, this awareness of the religious and cultural realities of our projects and programmes has until now been entrusted to the individual sensitivities of the programme officers, programme coordinators or heads of department and was not systematically considered as a fundamental prerequisite for all programme and project work. In recent years, the topic has also received attention from the SDC. The outgoing director Martin Dahinden pleaded in 2010, in his speech to the conference on ‘Religion Matters - Why and How?’, for the integration of *Religion and Culture*, because ‘for me, development cooperation is not a technocratic task. We must strive for contextuality, precision and concreteness, which is much more difficult, but also more fascinating.’ The project ‘Development cooperation – then tell me how you feel about religion?’, led by Anne-Marie Holenstein, examined the ambivalence of religious factors for development cooperation. This process was elaborated in the publication ‘Role and Significance of Religion and Spirituality² in Development Co-operation’³. *Fastenopfer* contributed two case studies from Egypt and Haiti to this. Similarly, within our own organisation, this cooperation triggered a process of reflection about the significance of the theme, which led to an additional strategic guideline, *Religion and Culture* becoming part of the new *Fastenopfer* Strategy for 2011-2016. In 2012, a part-time post was created to work on this theme.

This policy statement has been elaborated in dialogue with various programme and desk officers, as well as with the support of the *Fastenopfer* coordination units. A major concern was to include the

¹ *Fastenopfer* Mission Statement 1998, p.1.

² This policy statement does not use the term ‘spirituality’, because it has become a nebulous, over-used container word. Frequently, the term is used both in reference to ‘exotic’ forms of faith, and thus as a separation from the mainstream religious doctrines, as well as in the booming esoteric sphere.

³ Holenstein, Anne-Marie 2008: *Development and Religion* – Reader 1-3 with case studies. Also 2009: Final document: *Implications for practical work – methods and tools*. Bern: SDC.

perspectives of the latter, who are the actual cultural experts on the spot. Consequently, terms such as 'religion' and 'culture' were defined in a joint dialogue. The coordination units, as well as individual partner organisations, also contributed brief case studies which illustrate the influence of religious or cultural factors on their daily work. These stories are analysed and published in a separate publication.

This policy statement forms the basis for an explicit integration of the religious and cultural dimension into the project and programme work. The first part outlines and defines the themes and embeds them in the context of development cooperation. The second part establishes the guidelines for action and offers practice-oriented guiding principles. This policy statement is intended above all for the department heads, the programme officers, the programme coordinators and *Fastenopfer* partner organisations. However, since the aim is also to raise the awareness of *Fastenopfer* as an institution to culturally specific issues, the policy statement will also influence the educational and public relations work, as well as the advocacy and lobbying work on development cooperation.

Fastenopfer recognises *Religion and Culture* in its work as the driving force as well as the inhibiting factor for development, exploits its innovative potential and is aware of the importance of the socio-cultural context in the partner countries. For this reason, religious and cultural aspects are systematically included in the work. In this process, the differences in and between cultures are acknowledged and discussed in a constructive way, so that this can generate impulses for social change. This requires the heads of department, the programme and desk officers, as well as the coordinators and *Fastenopfer* as an organisation to pay constant attention to the local daily lives of the partners and the target population, and at the same time reflect their own identity.

A careful examination of the cultural and religious context of the programme countries requires that the individual staff members are allowed the necessary time. Ultimately, *Fastenopfer* is aware of the fact that, given the internationally accepted requirement for binding proof of effectiveness and quality assurance on the one hand, and the demand for cultural sensitivity on the other hand, it faces a dilemma. In practice, it demands of all involved not only a self-critical examination of their own tools, but also flexibility, creativity and openness in dealing with alternative methods of measuring effects.

The Policy Statement was approved by the Management on 1 July 2014.

2 Context and key issues

2.1 Terms

*'We are what we think. All that we are
arises with our thoughts. With our
thoughts, we make the world.'*

Siddhartha Gautama

2.1.1 Fastenopfer's understanding of culture

Culture⁴ is a very soft term, but it can sometimes have harsh effects. It is therefore essential to define the concept of culture as it is understood by *Fastenopfer*. The term 'culture' comes from the Latin 'colere' and means something like 'to cultivate', 'make arable', 'till the land', 'live', 'look after' and 'worship'. In European discourse, 'culture' has meant, since the end of the 17th century, both the cultivation of the land as well as 'the cultivation of the mind'.⁵

As early as in 1904, Max Weber defined culture as a 'web of symbols'. 'Culture' is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance.⁶ Clifford Geertz developed Weber's concept of culture further: 'The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs. The analysis of it is therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretative one in search of meaning.'⁷ The interpretative understanding of culture examines the world we live in and the associated value structures and self-perceptions within which we move, which we shape and constantly recreate. Culture thus represents the totality of what social groups, institutions or organisations set as standards and what their members have internalised as instruments of guidance for action.⁸ This means that culture incorporates much more than artistic spheres such as music, dance, theatre, art or film. Cultural diversity mobilises, connects, encourages dialogue, networking, creativity and innovation. Briefly, culture encompasses everything immaterial and material created and produced by people themselves, in contrast to nature which is not created and not altered by humans.

Such an understanding of the concept of culture is dynamic, creative and innovative and promotes social cohesion and the development of societies. Culture is therefore nothing that can be destroyed, lost or gained – even if individual elements of it can get lost or be destroyed.

With this in mind, *Fastenopfer* wants to give more weight to the cultural background of the partner organisations and the target population, and to use it productively in its project and programme work. As elaborated below, culture and religion are difficult to separate, which is why *Fastenopfer* combines the two aspects in one strategic guideline.

⁴ Culture and religion is referred to in the singular in this text. This is not to negate the diversity of cultural and religious forms of expression. Nor is it the goal of the policy statement to present different cultures and religions. Rather, the focus is on perceiving the factors of culture and religion and taking them seriously.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture>, 25.10.2014.

⁶ Weber, Max 1968: *The 'objectivity' of sociological and socio-political knowledge*. In: *Gesammelte Aufsätze und Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen. p. 180.

⁷ Geertz, Clifford 1983: *Thick Description: Towards an interpretative theory of culture*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. p. 9.

⁸ Based on Sutter, Alex 2009: *Was kann der menschliche Universalismus vom kulturellen Relativismus lernen?* http://www.humanrights.ch/upload/pdf/090608_Universalismus_Relativismus.pdf, 10.11.2013.

2.1.2 Fastenopfer's understanding of religion

'From time to time, we must rest and wait until our souls have caught up with us.'

Saying of indigenous groups in North America

If culture is understood to be, in the broadest sense, everything that is not predetermined by nature, but rather belongs to the realm of human activity and human creation, then religions in all their forms are aspects of cultural life. Based on the definition of culture, religions would, so to speak, be specific threads in the respective cultural web of a society. However, from a religious perspective, religions go beyond the realm of culture and cannot only be understood as products of human creation. Religions build on the recognition that something unfathomable, and at the same time all-encompassing, exists. This difficult-to-grasp object can also be called the 'sacred'. The sacred unites in itself characteristics such as 'the fascinating' (*faszinosum*), 'the awe-inspiring' (*tremendum*), 'absolute power' and 'the Other' (transcendent). Contained in this is also the human consciousness of the inaccessibility of this 'ultimate truth' or the 'great secret'. Religious ideas give answers to existential questions about the meaning of life, which is also called 'ultimate concern'⁹. Thus, it is not by chance that the word religion comes from the Latin *religio*, meaning 'to tie, to bind'. Religious concepts try to explain the rationally unexplainable, and can be vital for survival, particularly for the poorest population groups. Moreover, religions create community, are based on myths and symbols, are strengthened by rituals and ceremonies, and demand specific modes of behaviour from their followers. Because human beings always live at a specific time and in a specific cultural context, religions never exist in pure form; local manifestations are always the concrete product of specific socio-cultural interpretations and characteristics. The long history, and the global spread, of the five world religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism) were shaped specifically by the different socio-cultural and political contexts.¹⁰

Virtually no religion manages without religious authorities that mediate between the individual and the 'sacred'. Such religious authorities are characterised by quite different degrees of institutionalisation. Religious communities may organise themselves in small groups such as families, communities or communes such as monasteries. Larger religious groups institutionalise themselves in parishes, in non-denominational groups, in sects, free churches and mainstream churches. Large religious communities see their role not only in the joint practice of their religion, but usually also have a hierarchical order with a complex organisational structure. A system of rules which is binding on everyone and mostly written down, sets out the binding notions of order and the prevailing ethics. In addition, specific celebrations, cults or rituals have a binding effect that creates a sense of identity, differentiating individual institutionalised religions from each other.

The local population usually attaches greater importance to religious practice – such as performing daily rituals or visiting sacred places – than to the official teachings and dogmas of the large institutionalised religions. It is these lived religious ideas that shape daily life, for example in the form of traditional agricultural techniques or local health practices. They define moral values and social norms and

⁹ Based on Martin E. Marty 1988: *Pilgrims in Their Own Land*. New York: Penguin Books. p. 429-431.

¹⁰ The French Islamic scholar Oliver Roy clearly shows in 'Holy Ignorance' (Munich, 2010) that we find ourselves today in a historic process of transition. The traditional religious forms (Catholicism, Islamic Hanafism, Protestantism) increasingly mutate into fundamentalist currents of religiosity (Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Salafism). These newer forms share a desire to gain greater visibility in the public sphere and want to bring about a break with the traditional practices and cultural context. A barrier of doctrinal purity is erected, and the link between *Religion and Culture* is deliberately broken. Culture becomes the opponent of pure faith. This 'decontextualization' of religion allows simplified religious messages to be easily exported and globalised, according to Roy. Such a decontextualized interpretation of the holy texts makes them more sparse, more uncompromising, and self-referential. By contrast, if religious practice remains embedded in a cultural context and if it is mimetically passed down from one generation to the next, it is characterised by greater mutual tolerance. Because local people of different faith feel an affinity with each other through their shared cultural roots.

influence the rules of living together in the household, at the village and community level, and up to the level of national government.

This is why the strategic policy guideline on *Religion and Culture* does not focus primarily on the official teachings and dogmas of the big institutionalised religions, but rather on the daily religious practice of the people. This lived religious practice includes the belief in the existence of an invisible world which differs from the visible or material world but cannot be separated from it. This invisible world is an inherent part of the world of humans – both worlds are linked to each other and there is regular ‘traffic’ between them. A holistic understanding of religion therefore recognises that people’s social relations extend to this invisible world, and that they must maintain these as carefully as social contacts with neighbours, relatives and friends. Therefore, individuals and communities must invest heavily in their contacts with spiritual authorities, so that they can continue to count on their support for their own well-being (including material well-being). Such active contact with the spiritual force also gives people influence and energy. Religious and cultural empowerment thus becomes a factor for development cooperation that must be taken seriously.¹¹

2.1.3 Religious and cultural empowerment

For *Fastenopfer*, religious and cultural empowerment is therefore an important component of its work in the South. This is because by deliberately strengthening religious and cultural resources, support can be given to the local visions of development. Such resources include, for example, all the local knowledge in the field of traditional medicine, hunting, agriculture and manual crafts. But it also includes locally specific conflict resolution strategies, or the cultural attitude to grief, loss and aggression. Cultural and religious resources such as cosmological visions, orally transmitted genealogies, shared value and moral systems, marriage relations and the collective memory regulate social relations, transactions and cooperation between groups and individuals. Religious and cultural empowerment takes account, on the one hand, of the incorporation of ritual knowledge, which is mostly the preserve of ritual specialists,¹² but also of religious practice which marks the daily life of all people to a greater or lesser degree.

Fastenopfer is aware that religious empowerment can also pose risks. For example, *Religion and Culture* can be used to legitimise actions that lead to conflicts and violent confrontations. A conflict quickly becomes insoluble when one side claims to be the chosen people, invokes a biblical promise, a divine instance or a cultural authority. Religious and cultural dogmas or symbols give one’s own actions a legitimacy that doesn’t have to be justified, and can be used as tools to assert highly secular interests.¹³ But the fact that religious – as well as cultural – arguments and world views do not necessarily have to be morally good, but also exhibit ambivalent aspects, does not detract from the importance of integrating them in development cooperation. In this policy statement, *Fastenopfer* wants to focus mainly on the positive potential of religious and cultural empowerment without, however, naively ignoring the knowledge that religious arguments are misused to fan the flames in conflicts.

On the basis of these introductory considerations, there follows an exposition of the importance of integrating religious and cultural benchmarks into development cooperation.

¹¹ Compare also Ter Haar, Gerrie 2005: *Religion: Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation*. International Conference in Soesterberg. Cordaid / ICCO / ISS. p. 49.

¹² In this policy statement, ritual specialists are considered to be people who, while they have not acquired an institutional religious education, nevertheless distinguish themselves by their charisma and above all by specific – usually orally transmitted – knowledge. They are the repositories of mythological and/or ritual knowledge, know the ritual processes, the ritual songs and divination techniques, they can recite long lines of ancestors and myths of origin and/or have extensive knowledge about medicinal plants.

¹³ See also Interreligiöser Think-Tank, 2013: *Leitfaden für den interreligiösen Dialog*. Basel: Dreispitz. p. 18 /19.

2.2 Relevance of Religion & Culture for development

'The frog that lives in the well judges the size of the sky by the well's rim'.

from Asia

To date, the great majority of NGOs has no position (certainly none that is written down) on *Religion and Culture*. Even the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have – as UNESCO points out – a major gap in this regard. There is no Goal that directly relates to culture.¹⁴ A laudable exception is the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which has adopted the principle 'that culture, religion and the role of local power structures and institutions are taken into account in order to enable communities to become active partners in development.'¹⁵ This recognises that for a majority of the target population in development projects, *Religion and Culture* are an integral part of their view of the world, and fundamentally shape personal decisions as well as those that concern community development. For example, the religious and cultural context influences everyday strategies, such as how a sick child should be treated, when and how specific crops will be planted, whether to get involved in a project or refuse to cooperate.

Despite the fact that religious and cultural factors clearly have a marked impact on the lives of the individual actors and are central for decision-making, they are noticeably often neglected in development discourse. The reasons for this are examined below.

Culture – hush up or preserve?

The obvious awkwardness towards, if not actually tabooing of, religious and cultural questions has many different reasons: Religious and cultural perception deficits in development cooperation can be explained by the Western dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. In the Western mind, religion is a private matter and is kept out of the professional world if at all possible. Consequently, there is great reluctance to ask the partner organisations or the target population about religious or cultural influences, since it creates a certain feeling of unease to drag other people's private sphere into the public arena, or to even arouse the suspicion of wanting to impose and spread one's own faith.¹⁶ The employees of Western development organisations were mostly brought up in a secular environment and have internalised the assumption that *Religion and Culture* hinder the modernisation process, slow down development and therefore should be overcome. The culture and religion of the local population is often perceived as a relic to be preserved, or there is an unspoken agreement that science and development will ultimately help the people to leave their 'superstitious' and 'unscientific' condition behind.

Moreover, consideration of the cultural context of the partner organisations and the target population risks coming face to face with ambivalences which make the already complex programme and project work even more complicated. The associated fear of a possible potential conflict inherent in religious and cultural aspects plays a major role here. The safe approach would seem to be to simply avoid the issue. What is strange in this scenario is that subjects such as *gender*, access to land or *HIV/Aids* have an equally great potential for conflict, but have long been included in the international debate on development cooperation.

¹⁴ Holtz, Uwe 2006: *Die Rolle der Entwicklungspolitik im interkulturellen Dialog*. In: Einführung in die Entwicklungspolitik. Hamburg: Lit-Verlag. p. 354-364.

¹⁵ UNFPA 2004: *Working from Within. Culturally Sensitive Approaches in UNFPA Programming*. www.unfpa.org. 12.01.2014.

¹⁶ In her 2012 book '*Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und Religion*'. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, p. 77, Esther Imhof, too, points out that in our culture, the public space is defined as a religion-free space in which religious abstinence is required of the faithful, quite the opposite to the Nigerian context.

It is also worth mentioning quite practical reasons why *Religion and Culture* tend to be overlooked in the daily work. Above all, the omnipresent time pressure in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects explains the 'cultural deficit' of many projects and programmes. Not least, the quality management methods now prevalent in international development cooperation aim for a technically quantifiable measurability which uses the specialist jargon of modernising-theoretical reason. The local partner organisations have no choice but to take on the methodology and terminology, since after all they want to continue to be funded and remain compatible. The price they often pay for this is to blank out the reality of their cultural and religious life.¹⁷

By negating, or steering clear of, cultural and religious realities, the Western actors in development cooperation are not leaving them behind untouched. Rather, hushing up a major part of human identity means that the people affected are robbed of the opportunity to use *Religion and Culture* as a resource and to decide how, on the basis of their religious and cultural background, they could actively participate in shaping their future.¹⁸ A systematic, explicit and sensitive integration of cultural and religious factors into development cooperation is therefore a basic premise for its acceptance. This basic principle is reflected in the following *Fastenopfer* positions.

3 Positions and strategies adopted by Fastenopfer

Fastenopfer is aware that the partner organisations, as well as the target population, have specific and perhaps diverging visions of development and seek to achieve these on the basis of their own cultural and religious background. In dealing with the variety of different local strategies, *Fastenopfer* applies the following principles as a frame of orientation and reference:

- The recognition of cultural rights and respect of cultural and religious diversity are the prerequisites for any promising development cooperation.
- Only the individual awareness of each employee's own religious and cultural attitude, as well as a reflection on the religious and cultural identity of the whole organisation, can create an open attitude towards any differences we encounter in our partners in the programme countries.
- Respect for human rights, and in particular women's rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as respect for democratic principles, are indispensable, but must be negotiated in a culturally sensitive dialogue on a case by case basis so that, if possible, a common denominator can be found.
- This in turn presupposes constructive and critical, as well as pragmatic and respectful, cooperation with the partner organisations and the target population. And to achieve this requires a thorough examination of the respective socio-cultural context. *Fastenopfer* must allow the individual employees sufficient time to enable them to carry out a serious context analysis.
- *Fastenopfer* is aware that the international requirements regarding impact assessment and quality assurance often do not respond to the different project realities of the partner organisations. Therefore, a culturally sensitive use of these methods during the entire project or programme cycle management (PCM) demands a certain amount of flexibility in how they are applied, an openness to alternative methods of demonstrating outputs, and a transparent and honest communication from both sides which entails a frank disclosure of one's own constraints. While all this cannot resolve the dilemma between the neoliberal logic of impact assessment and the demand for cultural sensitivity, it can help to overcome the frequently existing gulf between the two.

¹⁷ See Holenstein, Anne-Marie 2009: *Religion und Entwicklung. Folgerungen für die Praxis*. Schlussdokument. Bern: SDC.

¹⁸ Ver Beek, Kurt A. 2000: *Spirituality: A Development Taboo*. In: *Development in Practice* (10).

Adherence to these five reference points is sometimes put to the test, especially at the interfaces with the three *Fastenopfer* core themes and the five strategic guidelines. Below we address respective challenges but also possible synergies.

3.1 Religion & Culture and Faith & Justice

*'Put one ear to the ground, then the other
one is open to the sky'*

unknown source

The religious component of *Fastenopfer* as a Catholic aid agency has been a major part of its identity since its foundation. Consequently, the core theme of *Faith and Justice* plays an important role. In formulating the departmental objective, a strong focus is consciously placed on the deepening of faith and strengthening of the personal and spiritual identity, which aims to allow women and men to live a life in dignity. It is no coincidence that there are many thematic synergies with the strategic guideline of *Religion and Culture*. However, some methodological demarcations can be made: While *Faith and Justice* is a core theme with the focus on content, *Religion and Culture* has a transversal character and is more intended as a culturally sensitive methodological approach. The strategic guideline of *Religion and Culture* is therefore of relevance for the entire institution and looks closely at *Fastenopfer* itself with regard to its cultural sensitivity.

By emphasising religious empowerment and the strengthening of cultural identity, both thematic areas start from the premise that an individual transformation is necessary in order to achieve social change. That is why both the core theme *Faith and Justice* as well as a culturally sensitive approach build on the empowerment approach. In this, the religious concept of development differs significantly from the secular growth model: While the secular world view places the main emphasis on attaining goals, the religious world view also pays attention to the route taken to get there.

When considering the core theme of *Faith and Justice* and the strategic guideline *Religion and Culture*, one is faced with three concepts: 1) Inculturation 2) Syncretism 3) Inter-religious dialogue. These three terms, which are difficult to grasp both in their use and their interpretation, are dealt with below:

- 1) Religions always move within cultural spheres, and the different religions within these spheres naturally interact with each other. The path of **Inculturation** denotes the translation of the (Christian) faith into local cultures and, associated with this, the integration of indigenous cultural elements into the mainstream culture. Being aware that the Christian faith has also always been 'incultured' opens up the possibility of inculturation to gain a new understanding of Christian faith, for example in theologies and Christologies that originate from Latin American, African or Asian realities. In its practical work, *Fastenopfer* emphasises the strengthening component of inculturation. Thus, indigenous Christians in Guatemala are encouraged to actively bring aspects of the Maya religion into their Christian faith. However, the concept of inculturation also has problematic connotations. Although the method of inculturation no longer seeks, as was once done by colonial regimes, to totally negate or even destroy the indigenous cultures, the concept is always associated with hegemonies. This is particularly so when it is used in Christian churches as an instrument of approximation to the local culture, or even for missionary purposes. For example, an incultured liturgy has 'indigenous elements' – such as vestments with traditionally woven patterns, holy figures with indigenous facial features, or a church architecture that borrows from local building traditions. On the one hand, this aims to show respect for the local culture. On the other hand, this must not obscure the power discourse of the Christian majority culture, in which the indigenous culture is

viewed from a church-centred perspective, and some elements are integrated into the church tradition in a very selective and superficial way – and not vice versa. The Jesuit Martin Maier stresses that a prerequisite for equal inculturation is ‘that no culture must be considered a priori as superior to another culture and that Christianity in its Western form should not be represented as the norm for other cultural areas. In the end, no specific culture can be seen as perfect, and no form of Christian faith set as absolute – not even the Roman faith.’¹⁹

- 2) In contrast to the concept of inculturation, the term of **Syncretism** – from the ancient Greek for ‘fusion’ – stands for a synthesis of different religious ideas or philosophies. This is seen more as a process than a fixed state or even a category. This process, which continuously reconstitutes itself out of different cultural meanings and identities, is marked by a high degree of permeability of boundaries and requires that the different religious partial aspects renounce any claim to absoluteness. Syncretism, however, always involves – as does the concept of inculturation – a negotiation of identities. By now it can be assumed that no religion exists in a ‘pure’ form any longer. Rather, all religious teaching is subject to syncretic processes. Critics accuse syncretic movements of allowing religious identities and commitments to be compromised.
- 3) **Inter-religious dialogue** is currently a frequently used term that needs to be clarified: In 1971, the dialogue department of the World Council of Churches was set up – an important platform for inter-religious dialogue, with participants and specialists from ten world religions.²⁰ Although the Ecumenical Council of Churches continues to be convinced of the importance of inter-religious dialogue, it has come to the conclusion, after several plenary meetings, that dialogue alone is not enough. Rather, dialogue must be transformed into common action grounded in collectively shared values such as respect, dignity, equality and peace. To this end, one’s own faith background must be reflected, and an equal place be allowed to the religious background of the partners in the debate. On the basis of commonly shared values, dialogue can be constructive when it is rooted in the practical daily-life problems of the local population. However, dialogue can be destructive and indeed creates conflict when it is not transparent, in the course of inter-religious dialogue, who is behind the dialogue and whether there is a hidden agenda (for example in the form of missionary objectives). There is also a great danger that inter-religious dialogue is limited only to representatives of the major faith communities and that less institutionalised or marginalised religious groups are excluded. Practical guidelines are provided in chapter 4.4 to avoid to some extent such possible traps in inter-religious dialogue.

Fastenopfer therefore endeavours to be aware of, and take seriously, the religious practice of its partners in the South in the form of an *interfaith* dialogue on equal terms. That is why the 2008 *Fastenopfer*-policy statement on ‘Building Communities – Living our Faith’ states that: ‘Cooperation with partners of different religious denominations or communities takes place through reciprocal dialogue and respect. In an interdenominational context, the consequences of pastoral decisions on the coexistence of different confessions and religions must be questioned. (...). The goal is always a peaceful co-existence and life quality improvement for the disadvantaged, independent of religion. In this way, our programme work distances itself from any kind of fundamentalism as a misuse of religion.’²¹

Because it is aware that religion can also be instrumentalised for people’s own interest, *Fastenopfer* tries to focus on the positive, constructive and mobilising force of religion for social change in all *Fastenopfer* projects and to support it in a positive way.

¹⁹ Source: http://www.stimmen-derzeit.de/zeitschrift/archiv/beitrag_details?k_beitrag=1624516&query_start=1&k_produkt=1836430 (24.4.14).

²⁰ Cordaid / ICCO / ISS 2005: *Religion: Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation*. International Conference in Soesterberg.

²¹ *Fastenopfer* Policy Statement 2008: ‘Building communities – living our faith’

3.2 Religion & Culture and Food Sovereignty

*'The person who has not travelled far
thinks her mother is the best cook.'*

from Uganda

Food security is another of the three basic pillars of *Fastenopfer's* programme work. The goal is to ensure that a growing number of people are able to feed themselves sustainably and *in a self-determined way*. This approach addresses the cultural significance of food preparation and food consumption. The French top chef Brillat-Savarin hit the nail on the head with his saying: '*Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es*' (tell me what you eat and I tell you what you are). Our eating habits say a lot about ourselves. Because social and cultural rules stipulate quite specifically what can be eaten and what can't, how food has to be prepared, how to behave when consuming food, who is entitled to what food. In this, psychosocial, cognitive and cultural factors, but also economic and health considerations, the products available, regional or personal customs, individual taste, as well as one's emotional state, play a role. For the ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the totality of social structures is in fact passed on through food in an unconscious way. For example, the social environment conveys specific ideals of beauty or body image, determines the value placed on, or dislike of, specific foods and drinks, passes on ideas of cleanliness or culturally fixed taboos, and not least, is also used to set social boundaries. Thus, the common cuisine or shared table, as well as shared taste, bind a group of people together and promote their social interaction. On the other hand, strange cooking or the refusal of a shared meal separates people from each other, and can even be used as a differentiating social characteristic.

Similar to dietary behaviour and food preparation, the cultivation and preservation of food products are also culturally shaped to the highest degree. Access to land and land ownership, agricultural techniques and growing cycles, as well as the associated local knowledge, specific storage and processing methods, the choice of seeds, the handling of livestock, or the gender-specific division of labour, are established in the cultural repertoire. Many indigenous cultures make their living mostly from collecting wild berries, roots and insects, and by hunting. For many smallholder communities, as well as for hunters and gatherers, the use and production of food is obviously part of a religious context. This may take the form of ancestors or divine figures which populate the fields and forests, guard them and are responsible for their fertility. Observing specific taboos, and the regular offering of sacrifice ensure that the contact with the invisible world is never broken, and guarantee *food sovereignty* for future generations.

Rural projects and programmes of development cooperation that do not take these distinctive factors sufficiently into account are unlikely to bear fruit. Equally, if during project visits the rules of communal eating are not understood, or indeed are deliberately violated, or if insufficient time is devoted to a communal meal, then this can lead to cultural discords and be interpreted as a breach of trust. This is not conducive to a successful project.

3.3 Religion & Culture and Human Rights

'No family can put up a sign: Everything is fine here'.

from China

Aid agencies such as *Fastenopfer* that want to live up to their aspiration of working in a culturally sensitive way on the one hand, while being committed to the implementation of human rights on the other hand, sometimes face a great challenge. Cultural rights, freedom of religion and human rights are closely interlinked. According to the 'Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity', cultural rights are an integral part of universal human rights, because cultural diversity can only be protected and promoted when human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of information and communication, and the freedom of individuals to choose their forms of cultural expression, are guaranteed.

But let us take a look back: In 1946, on the ruins of one of the worst, most unjust regimes in human history, a committee was set up under the aegis of UNESCO, consisting of members of different cultural, political and religious backgrounds, which set itself the ambitious goal of safeguarding world peace and examining the question of human rights. This meant that the committee was faced with solving the virtually impossible task of defining which rights and values should be enshrined as universal, and which should not. After a debate lasting two years, the universally valid human rights were finally formulated in 1948. Lengthy discussions produced a compromise in the form of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which established the principle of cultural freedom and of freedom of religion.

Not least due to this, the debate about the universality of human rights was ignited – a discussion that continues to this day. Thus, some religious communities, as for example Islam, cannot agree with the right to conversion, since this violates the Islamic principle which considers a change of religion to be blasphemy. The 1981 supplementary document 'Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief', contains stumbling blocks for some religious communities. For instance, it underlines the right to agnosticism, atheism and rationalism. Other tensions arise due to discrimination on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, inhumane punishments, genital mutilation or forced marriage. Moreover, most states – including Western states – have a tendency to use or circumvent human rights for their own interests. Thus, although the most fundamental human rights, such as the prohibition of torture or of slavery, are today part of customary international law and are binding on all UN Member States, in reality there are quite a number of states which, although they have ratified the UN Convention against torture, continue to systematically mistreat their detainees, engage in people trafficking or slavery.

Claim to universality versus cultural relativism?

Not least because of the danger of instrumentalisation, the discussion about the universality of human rights must pose the question of whether it is legitimate that 'we', with our historical background, are imposing a moral straitjacket on 'the others' with the concept of human rights. Alex Sutter²² argues that the universalist zeal must be contained so it can remain open for discussion. Because when human rights are asserted with a universalism that is seen as absolutist, that wants to dictate specific normative ideas as moral principles to everyone in a uniform way, this often happens in an arrogant and counterproductive manner. Anyone who does not share this reference is labelled as irrational, stupid or

²² Sutter, Alex 2009: 'Was kann der menschenrechtliche Universalismus vom kulturellen Relativismus lernen?' http://www.humanrights.ch/upload/pdf/090608_Universalismus_Relativismus.pdf.

primitive. This tends to overlook the fact that a universal, cross-cultural understanding of right and wrong exists, and that there is no culture or religion that does not punish amoral conduct such as lying, stealing or murder in some form. Christoph Antweiler²³ therefore argues that the search for universalities should be combined with the recognition of human diversity, which he expresses with the following formula: 'Every human being is like all humans, like some other humans, like no single human'. A self-critical universalism therefore emphasises self-reflection, with an awareness of the context in which the respective self-reflections and convictions are bound.

The either-or-mentality is no longer in step with the times. Rather, the validity of human rights must constantly be made plausible anew, in a communicative process that is beyond morally charged proselytising. Even in cases where it seems at first that the limit of tolerance has been crossed – as for example in the case of female genital mutilation – the moral ethos imposes an appropriate intervention. This means pursuing civilised forms of dialogue; a dialogue of equals, which is characterised by a desire for mutual understanding and the capacity to understand different perspectives. One must always be aware that breaking off the dialogue, or abandoning a difficult project ultimately does not serve the affected target population. The great challenge for *Fastenopfer's* work is to deal with the tension between universally valid human rights and the right to cultural self-determination, and to never cease to build bridges between them.

3.4 Religion & Culture and Gender

*'A woman without a man – a boat without a rudder;
a man without a woman – a horse without reins.'*

from the Philippines

A culturally sensitive approach to gender equality requires, in the same way as with human rights, walking a cultural tightrope. First of all, it should be stressed that the unequal treatment of the sexes is not in itself linked to *Religion and Culture*, but that religious-cultural arguments are often used to legitimise it. Both in the Bible as in the Quran, the Sunna or the Torah, numerous places can be found which, in a historical, patriarchal context, approve of discrimination against women or promote the heroizing of men. However, there are also passages in all religious texts that emphasise equal rights of women and men. Thus, in the early periods of all the major religious communities, women carried out equally important functions as clan mothers, prophets or judges. It becomes problematic when, by means of an interpretation of religious texts taken out of context, the equally important role of women and men is blanked out and the oppression of one gender is justified by religion.

Thus, religious-cultural arguments and gender equality are sometimes as hotly contested as cultural aspects and human rights. On the one hand, women are hailed as the preservers of culture and the guardians of morals, whose task it is to pass on moral values and norms to the next generation. At the same time, there is a whole litany of gender-specific abuse that is fuelled by the mixture of culture and religion. The spectrum is vast: it ranges from forced marriages to honour killings via genital mutilation and dowry murders to the dictate that women completely cover up their body, the belief that it is natural for women to suffer violence or to be deprived of political and social rights.

On the other hand, the majority of the major world religions give man the role of protector and provider for the family. It means that both men and women are trapped in stereotypical roles which can be of different degree of intensity depending on the cultural and religious context. It also means that boys and men who cannot, or don't want to, identify primarily with attributes such as force, strength, courage,

²³ Antweiler, Christoph 2007: *'Was ist Menschen gemeinsam? Über Kultur und Kulturen'*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

aggression, dominance or rationality, experience marginalisation or discrimination of varying degrees of intensity.²⁴

In examining the different gender roles, development cooperation has to perform a delicate balancing act – between respecting the right to religious freedom and cultural difference, and protecting human rights. The right to cultural difference includes differently determined gender roles, which in turn implies that women and men who belong to a ‘cultural circle’ do not automatically also share a homogenous political agenda, or an identical religious and cultural belief. However, where the right to cultural difference touches the limits of human rights, a culturally-sensitive dialogue has to be introduced, and common, practical measures for greater gender equality negotiated. If one of the partners in the discussion does not show any willingness for greater flexibility, even after a thorough dialogue, then an end of the cooperation may have to be considered as a last resort.

3.5 Religion & Culture as a complementary dimension of sustainability

‘We have not inherited the earth from our parents, rather we have borrowed it from our children.’

Saying of the Dakota

When people refer to *sustainability*, they generally mean the sustainable management of resources in terms of the economy, the environment and social concerns. However, limiting it to these three pillars does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Rather, culture must be included as a vital dimension for sustainable global development.

The declarations adopted by the United Nations state that culture is an integral part of sustainable development. The general conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation confirmed in 2005 that cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of humanity. It recognises that cultural diversity forms a common heritage of humanity and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all. Cultural liberty is therefore one of the fundamental human rights which is a vital part of human development – and is defined as such in the UNDP²⁵ Human Development Report 2004. Sustainable development cooperation must recognise and include culture as a creative force. If one grapples with different ways of life, visions and world views on equal terms, and reflects on and discusses different models of progress and development, one can also jointly recognise a global responsibility and ethics. It is therefore essential that the development policy triangle – consisting of the social, economic and ecological dimension – is supplemented by a cultural perspective. That is also why it is important for the post-2015 agenda that the cultural aspects are integrated more explicitly as a transversal goal when formulating the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG) – always with the intention of strengthening the right to cultural diversity and cultural identity in the development agenda.

²⁴ The South African FO-partner organisation PACSA addresses gender-specific roles in an exemplary way and regularly organises workshops with boys and men in which they discuss masculinity and its implications for the daily coexistence of the sexes. See also: PACSA, 2013: *‘Men and Masculinities in South Africa’*.

²⁵ UNDP is the United Nations Development Programme.

3.6 Religion & Culture and Conflict Sensitivity

'A person looks after her or his hair every day, why not also after the heart?'

from India

From 2006 onwards, *Fastenopfer*, together with OPSI²⁶, introduced a process designed to integrate the psychosocial approach into its project and programme work. As a result of this process, which took several years, a new strategic guideline on *Conflict Sensitivity* was defined in the new *Fastenopfer* Strategy (2011-2016), and an evaluation tool for psychosocial conflict analysis²⁷ was developed in cooperation with SDC and OPSI.

The basic assumption of the psychosocial approach is that a project is significantly shaped by three aspects, which are closely interlinked: 1. Improvement of living conditions, 2. Individual circumstances, 3. Social processes. In people's daily life, these three components are characterised by very distinctive cultural features. Thus, the specific ways of dealing with shame, anger, death, experiences of grief and loss, coping with violent and conflict situations, as well as with healing and reconciliation, or ideas of power structures and justice, are always conditioned by cultural concepts. It is therefore essential that underlying religious and cultural factors are systematically taken into consideration when applying the psychosocial tool. It means that local religious and culturally tested forms of reconciliation and conflict resolution should be supported in the projects and programmes, that traditions of collective grief and trauma processing are strengthened, and the local population is actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects, so that 'cultural' factors are integrated from the start and people can fully and completely back the project. The application of the psychosocial analysis and evaluation tool envisages that the cultural conflict dimensions, but also cultural taboos and locally specific conflict, discussion and story-telling cultures are always taken into account and given sufficient attention. It should be remembered that even within a project, it cannot be assumed that a homogenous cultural identity exists, even if all project participants belong to the same ethnic group. Such differences should be noted and addressed, because they can form the basis for greater mutual understanding and fruitful discussions.

3.7 Religion & Culture and Corruption

'A hair separates the truth from the lie.'

from Iran

Corruption takes many forms. The perception and interpretation of corrupt conduct varies, depending on the religious or cultural context. At the same time, corruption is also a global phenomenon and cannot solely be explained with cultural arguments. It is not surprising that the zero tolerance policy adopted by many development organisations often comes up against its limits. Because in the area of corruption, we also walk a tightrope between cultural sensitivity and moral principles. On the one hand, refusing to accept gifts or invitations can be perceived as a cultural snub and adversely affect the relationship with the project partners and target groups. On the other hand, cultural justification is quickly resorted to when the issue of corruption is raised in a project. Thus, nepotism, patronage, misappropriation or bribery are not uncommonly legitimised by claiming that this is an expression of the local tradition. An

²⁶ OPSI: *Office for Psychosocial Issues*. Berlin, <http://opsiconsult.com/>

²⁷ G:\SUD\02_Arbeitsinstrumente\02_Konzepte\02_DNH_PSA_OPSI\01_Tool_PSA_dt.

important step in preventing corruption from being morally legitimised is, according to Christoph Stückelberger²⁸, to clearly distinguish between gifts and bribes. He offers a helpful delimitation:

- **Gifts** are given openly and transparently, are voluntary, without expecting anything in return, and are appropriate / modest in their material value.
- **Bribes** are made in a hidden / secret way, often under pressure, in order to obtain something, and in the clear expectation of a quid pro quo. In the modern setting of corruption, they often exceed the value of gifts many times.

The boundaries can therefore be drawn at a point where gifts are no longer primarily an expression of esteem for the person being given the gift, but rather are linked to clear expectations of reciprocal gifts and of obtaining an advantage. *Fastenopfer* therefore adopts the practice of only accepting gifts and invitations that are offered openly and transparently, do not exceed reasonable proportions, and are not linked to any expectations. However, the discussion about the proportionality of a gift has to take place against the background of the respective project context. Because the 'magical character of a gift'²⁹ embodies subtle and culturally determined nuances. Therefore, one should carefully avoid immediately suspecting every gesture of generosity or hospitality as attempted corruption. Common sense and the individual's intercultural sensitivity should enable them to quickly recognize blackmail attempts that seek to influence the future course of the project, or attempts to gain advantage via bribes, and at the same time be relaxed about receiving or giving gifts.

In practice, different interpretations of nepotism and favouritism also give rise to difficulties, since differences in understanding can forcefully collide with each other. Thus, the programme coordinators, programme managers or target groups in the project countries feel that the local concept of family connections places greater family responsibilities on them, and obliges them to favour relatives. This in turn goes against the concept of nepotism with its negative connotations for the donor partners. Here, too, the conflict should be addressed openly, and the limits of what is tolerable should be established. It is therefore elementary that views are exchanged with the respective project partners and the target groups and an agreement is reached about what is understood by corruption, and rules of behaviour are jointly agreed. A first step in the right direction is a discussion of the anticorruption clause in the *Fastenopfer* contracts with the programme coordination unit and the project partners.³⁰

3.8 Religion & Culture and HIV/Aids

'Languages differ, but a cough is the same everywhere.'

from Nigeria

Although *Fastenopfer* does not work directly in the field of health, it is confronted with the problem of *HIV/Aids* more or less directly in the project contexts. For this reason, some considerations are set out here on a culturally sensitive approach to this topic. It is a mistake to reduce *HIV/Aids* to a biomedical phenomenon. The pandemic is, on the one hand, a symptom of poverty and social injustice. On the

²⁸ Christoph Stückelberger is the director of Globethics.net and founding president of Transparency International Switzerland. The quotes are from his 2012 article '*Schmiergeld oder Geschenk*'. Berne: Transparency International Schweiz.

²⁹ In his '*Essai sur le don*' (1922/23), the French sociologist Marcel Mauss analysed the system of exchanging gifts and interpreted its function in relation to the social order. Mauss coined the term 'Gift Economy'. In the Maori concept of 'hau', Mauss finds the explanation for the obligatory reciprocity of giving. Contained in the gift is so-to-speak a 'spirit', a 'soul', with which a soul-bond is created between the giver and the recipient by the act of giving, with a moral obligation to reciprocate on the part of the recipient.

³⁰ See '*Fastenopfer –Review of risk analysis on corruption*' 2013 and the two publications by Transparency International Schweiz and *Bread for all: 'Korruption in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit' / 'Korruptionsprävention in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit'*.

other hand, the way it is dealt with also reflects the world view or cosmology of the people who are directly or indirectly affected. It is therefore hardly surprising that *Religion and Culture* play a key role in the way in which societies deal with the causes and consequences of *HIV/Aids*. Based on Willemse³¹ one can identify roughly three different religiously inspired or culturally shared reactions:

- Promotion of responses of exclusion, taboos and stigmatisation
- Increase of care and support measures, based on empathy and sympathy
- Impetus to initiate discussion of gender-based relations, cultural and religious notions of sexuality, fertility, health, sickness, the body and morals.

The occurrence of a pandemic such as *HIV/Aids* triggers crisis-like reactions in any society and demands collectively shared explanations. Inexplicable crises are particularly suitable for projecting images of an enemy. Thus, after the disease emerged in the 1980s, world conspiracy theories appeared quickly in Western societies. In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also in South East Asia and the Caribbean, ancestral spirits or concepts of witchcraft continue to play a vital role in how people suffering from *HIV/Aids* are treated.³² In some areas in the world, the term AIDS also stands for 'American Invention to Discourage Sex', which does not exactly set a favourable prospect for successful prevention strategies.

Many *HIV/Aids* prevention projects now have to acknowledge that, while they have managed to achieve a considerable transformation of awareness, they have only had a marginal influence on people's actual behaviour. This is not least due to the fact that Western strategies tend to ignore local etiologies of disease³³. Slowly, some NGOs have come to the view that they must look at social structures, social realities, local patterns of explanation and cultural logic, identify positive elements and, as far as possible, complement biomedical prevention and treatment strategies. That is why local ritual specialists should be included in all interventions on an equal basis, so that their ritual knowledge and psychosocial capabilities can be mobilised. In many contexts, diseases tend to have collective rather than individual causes and have to be treated with a holistic approach. Contrary to what happens in Western societies, diseases and causes of problems are mostly sought outside of the person affected and demand the restoration of a socio-religious order: 'In our tradition, the self is more a social self. That is the reason why our healers don't immediately treat the individual, but first talk about our family, our friends and other people or topics. (...) They treat you as a social being.'³⁴

Besides taking account of underlying cultural conditions, there is also a need within the Christian context for a new 'theology of sexuality' which explicitly addresses physicality and accepts human sexuality as an integral part of being human.³⁵ This must not, however, lose sight of damaging cultural practices that violate human rights, such as the belief that an HIV infection can be cured by raping a virgin, or the fact that new infections occur as a result of genital cutting of girls or boys with non-sterile instruments, or the social exclusion of *HIV/Aids* sufferers.³⁶

Based on the interfaces and tensions with the *Fastenopfer* core themes or strategic guidelines presented in the preceding chapter, the next section will outline practical guidelines for action for a more

³¹ Willemse, Karin 2005: *Religion and HIV/AIDS*. In: Religion a Source of Human Rights and Development Cooperation. CORDAID. p. 18.

³² Medicus mundi devoted a conference to this subject on 6.5.2009 called 'Culture and Condoms'.

³³ The term 'etiology' in medicine is the science of the causes or origin of disease. In medical anthropology, it refers to local patterns of explanations for diseases, among other things.

³⁴ From: Kalha, Ulla 2007: Religion als international anerkanntes Menschenrecht. In: Religion und Entwicklung. Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag.

³⁵ A good example of this is the work of the South African partner organisation Ujamaa, which uses contextual bible reading and practice-oriented theological discussion to encourage reflections about local living conditions – including the high degree of prevalence of HIV/ Aids.

³⁶ Willemse, Karin 2005: Religion and HIV/AIDS. In: Religion a Source of Human Rights and Development Cooperation. CORDAID. p. 19.

conscious integration of religious and cultural dimensions into the programme and project work, but also into the advocacy, lobbying, marketing and educational work.

4 Operational guidelines for implementation

4.1 Background knowledge and cultural sensitivity

*'If you want to change the world, go
through your own house three times.'*

from Japan

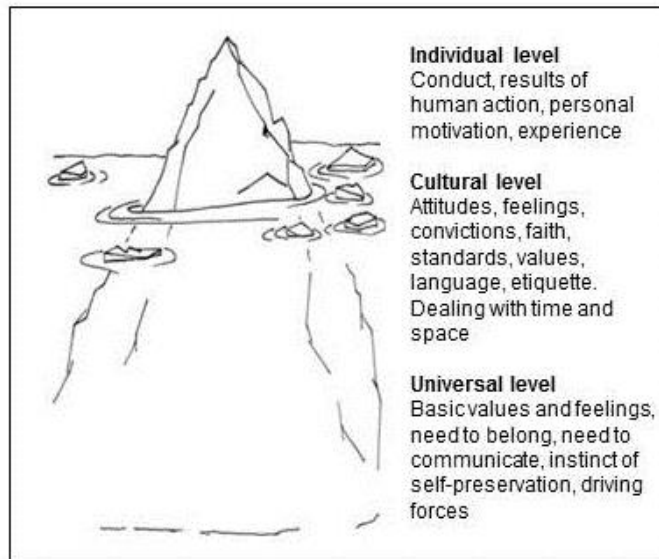
When, in our daily work routine, do we start to doubt whether what we do is really culturally sensitive? Is it culturally sensitive, for example, if partner meetings take place in an environment (such as hotels or conference centres) that has very little in common with the working and living reality of most participants? Is it culturally sensitive if we measure the effectiveness of the projects mainly via quantifiable indicators which often only remotely reflect the reality of the local contexts? How culturally sensitive do we create our communication? Do our partners take account of our own cultural peculiarities and sensitivities in their interaction with us? Below, some guidelines are offered that aim to support a culturally-sensitive approach.

Cultural sensitivity is not a tool that comes ready-made. Cultural or indeed intercultural competence presupposes a tenacious and time-intensive process which only becomes possible, on the one hand, by gaining awareness of one's own culture and clarity about one's own religious identity and which, on the other hand, requires deep knowledge about the 'other' culture and an understanding of the increasingly blurred boundaries of cultural mixes. A solid foundation for acquiring this knowledge is a fairly long stay in a culturally alien environment. In addition, it requires enormous patience to cope with intercultural tensions and not to instantly try to smooth them over. Because only by investing a lot of time, a genuine interest in communication, and the will to change one's perspective can a consensus be found, which is generated from an awareness of the relativity of viewpoints and fundamental mutual respect.

The first step consists of acquiring the widest possible knowledge about the context of the project or programme. So the 'outsider'³⁷ must try to find out about the local knowledge and faith system and to understand it as well as possible. This can only happen by means of observation, participation and discussion. This in turn demands that the necessary time is made available. The second step involves creating opportunities and spaces to enable the local population to think about their personal, as well as the community's, goals. Discussions should take place on how their own practices and knowledge systems, as well as alternatives and innovations, could help or hinder in achieving these goals. Finally, the local people must decide which goals they want to achieve, what 'outside' support they need, and what role their own 'traditions' should play in this process.³⁸

³⁷ Depending on the situation and context, the 'outsider' can be a programme officer, a programme coordinator, a project coordinator or a member of the target group.

³⁸ Ver Beek, Kurt A. 2000: Spirituality: A Development Taboo. In: Development in Practice. Vol.10, p. 41.



Source: www.rsb-relocation.de
Translation: Barbara König

The model of the iceberg is a good way of demonstrating the differences in cultural perceptions and forms of communication. This is because the special feature of icebergs is that only one seventh is visible. The remaining six seventh are hidden below the water surface. When two or several icebergs encounter each other, one needs to observe how the visible and invisible levels interact.

In human interaction, we initially see the individual level – that is the ‘tip of the iceberg’ – of the other person. However, below this surface, there are implicit patterns of behaviour and values that are shaped by the interlocutor’s specific cultural environment. Since these are part of the unspoken, and at first glance mostly invisible, sphere, this is where most cultural misunderstandings occur. However, if one considers the third level, the universal level, then universal values and feelings become visible which unite people across cultural and religious boundaries. Communication at this third level is likely to hold the greatest development potential. The wearing of the culture lens illustrated below tries to lift the fog around the mostly hidden middle of the iceberg – the cultural level.

4.2 The ‘culture lens’

*‘If one looks at a leopard through a pipe,
one can only see one spot.’*

from China

We all look at our encounters and experiences through the ‘lens’ of our own cultural background – through our ‘cultural contact lenses’ – as the Harvard psychologist Gilbert³⁹ calls them. While the short-sighted person who wears spectacles usually only becomes aware of wearing glasses when they can’t be found, we cannot place our cultural lenses on the bedside table at night. Their effect is much greater. They are more like contact lenses that are always on our eyeballs. These lenses sharpen or restrict our vision, so that we only see particular things. People involved in development cooperation also constantly perceive their local partners through their culture lens – and vice versa. When they form a judgement of

³⁹ Gilbert, Daniel 2008: *Stumbling on Happiness*. New York: Knopf Publishers.

whether they can trust the other, they initially and inevitably apply the evaluation patterns of their own culture.

The awareness that we all wear cultural lenses is used in the *culture lens* approach put forward by UNFPA⁴⁰. It suggests that we should not only be aware of our own cultural identity, but occasionally try to swap this with the lenses of our counterpart. This gives us greater clarity about the socio-cultural realities of societies in which our projects and programmes are taking place. This deliberate change of perspective enables us to identify influential local power structures and groups that can be potential partners or opponents of development cooperation programmes. It also makes any internal cultural tensions and demands of different sub-cultures apparent. UNFPA differentiates four levels that should be analysed with the culture lens:

A) Political, legal, socio-economic and cultural realities

Acquisition and accumulation of knowledge about legal, political, social, economic and cultural realities. This gives development practitioners a better understanding of the dynamics of change in a community in which they work.

B) Community acceptance and ownership

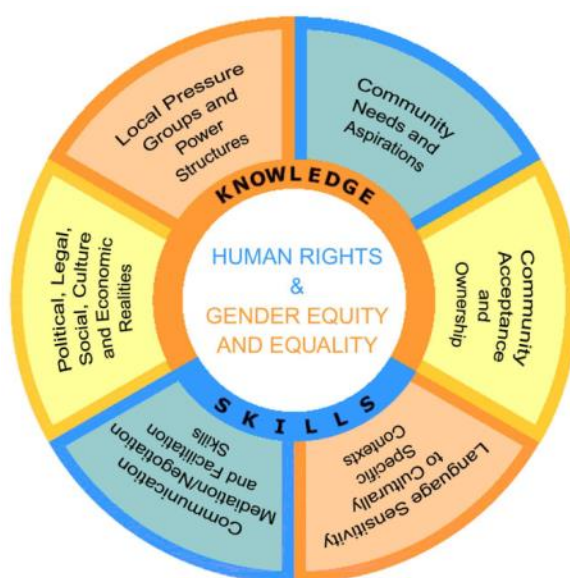
Only by knowing the factors that contribute to the acceptance and ownership of a project by the community can a project's sustainable success be achieved. To this end, sources of support as well as opposition to the project must be identified.

C) Pressure groups, power structures and civil society groups

Knowledge of existing power structures, as well as of groups involved in civil society and their respective agendas, facilitates their integration and participation in the programme.

D) Community needs and aspirations

Knowledge of the different needs, tensions, wishes and aspirations of the community helps to achieve a more sustainable success and enables genuine community ownership.



From: 'Participants Training Manual', UNFPA, 2009: p. 2.

⁴⁰ UNFPA 2009: *Integrating Human Rights, Culture and Gender in Programming*. See Tool 1.

As the diagram shows, specific capabilities, such as culturally sensitive communication, are needed in addition to in-depth knowledge of local realities, predominant power structures and awareness of the needs and vision of individuals and communities.

4.3 Culturally sensitive communication

*'More people stumble over their tongue
than over their feet.'*

from Tunisia

Linguistic sensitivity to culturally specific contexts is shown by an awareness of what can be communicated how and when. This can relate to the tone used in interactions and the body language used in communication, and whether verbal and non-verbal communication are in harmony. A culturally sensitive communicator thinks about how to pose questions without appearing controlling. Or how to arouse curiosity without making false promises or evoking unrealisable aspirations. He or she is also able to create a climate of trust and at the same time to remain authentic. This requires a lot of time, reflecting one's own style of communication, and developing a sense of how verbal and non-verbal communication is practised in the 'other' culture. Furthermore, one should consider how conflicts are dealt with, how to criticise without the counterpart losing face, and what type of humour is appropriate.

The following aspects indicate culturally sensitive communication:

1) **Creating a pleasant atmosphere for discussions**

Communication should take place in a pleasant atmosphere for all partners. Consideration should be given, in addition to a familiar environment, to a balanced representation of the different parties and the seating arrangements. It would, for example, be inappropriate if one representative of the target group was facing several representatives of the donor organisation, or if the programme officer is occupying the only chair in the room. This visually reinforces power relationships. Discussions should therefore take place on an equal footing, too. It is vital that all partners in the dialogue are able to express themselves freely and without fear, and that one is open to dialogue oneself.

2) **Humour**

A relaxed atmosphere for discussions also leaves space for humorous remarks and jokes. In many cultures, difficult subjects (such as gender relations or acute conflicts) tend to be approached through humorous anecdotes or witty comments. Special attention should therefore be paid to such comments. It is of course vital, when using humour, that this is understood and shared in the different cultural context. Developing a sensitive grasp of 'locally accepted humour' requires a lot of knowledge about the local culture. Otherwise, a 'humorous' comment that is inappropriate for the local context can very quickly be seen as an insult or injury to someone's honour.

3) **Being able to listen and taking one's time**

A good listener can recognise the fears and feelings of the other party, is aware of his/her own 'blind spots', prejudices and bias (e.g. *gender* bias), and is open to 'unexpected' answers. What's more, tricky subjects are often only mentioned later in the course of a conversation. Therefore, one should always take care not to allow the length of a conversation to be dictated by one's own impatience, or by a tight schedule. Since attitudes to time and punctuality are very much culturally defined and often lead to tensions and misunderstanding in cooperation, a certain degree of flexibility and tolerance has to be factored in.

4) **Remaining curious**

Ask open-ended questions (what? how? when? where? why?), without already knowing the 'right' answer. It is also worth asking questions which at first glance are not directly linked to the success of the project and perhaps surprise the other party, but never offend them.

5) **Encouraging and empathizing**

Positive body language and approving noises encourage the other party to continue speaking. There is also a need for empathy and genuine sympathy – especially when sensitive culture-specific or religious subjects are addressed. This means that one tries to understand the other person, but does not automatically accept or justify their position. Rather, the aim is to show that one is genuinely interested in the context, in the other person's situation – but never makes judgemental comments.

6) **Discussing gender-specific issues in a gender-sensitive way**

Women and men communicate differently in all cultures. In order to take this specificity into account, but also so as not to place men and women in situations they find awkward, it is a good idea – depending on the subject – to form gender-segregated discussion groups. Care should also be taken to ensure that in a discussion dealing with sensitive subjects, the questioners and questioned are of the same gender.

7) **Paraphrasing and summarising**

Repeat the other party's answers in one's own words so one can check whether the message has been properly understood, and also so as to communicate to the other person that one has understood their point of view and feelings. The method of paraphrasing can also be a way of softening aggressive responses and creating a more open atmosphere for talking. At the end of a discussion, one should try to summarise the key elements to ensure that all participants in the discussion share an understanding of the main message.

8) **Pay attention to informal conversations**

Often, important concerns or tensions are only mentioned after the 'official' discussion has ended. It is therefore important not to ignore the statements emerging from informal chats and passing comments which usually take place in the local language. If one doesn't speak the local language, or does not know it well enough, it is worth asking the interpreter (this is most often the programme coordinator) to pay attention to what is said in these informal conversations. Another advantage of involving a local third person as interpreter is that they can provide not only a linguistic, but also a cultural translation.

In summary, culturally sensitive communication means that one listens and hears. This means not only hearing verbally communicated messages, but also paying attention to the feelings and fears of the other person. At the same time, good communicators are able to translate the principles of their own organisation in a culturally sensitive way so that they are understood in the respective context in which the programme is taking place.

Education, communication and marketing

The departments of education, marketing and communication are also required to communicate in a culturally sensitive way. Here, the images we use to present the 'foreign' project partners to the public are vital, as are the words we use to describe different ways of life, and whether we let the voices from the South speak for themselves. The following principles must be observed when choosing images and words:

- Do not present representatives of the target groups in images and words as weak victims, but rather as committed actors.

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- Do not perpetuate cultural clichés in images and words (as for example blanking out ‘modern’ attributes), but actively help to challenge stereotypical images and make the ‘unexpected’ visible.
 - Avoid judgemental or even racist attributes (e.g. expressions such as ‘primitive’, ‘race’, or ‘Indian’).
 - Avoid static, romanticising or exotic attributes (such as ‘untouched’, ‘isolated’, ‘still living in the stone age’ or ‘harmonic’).

The approaches to culturally sensitive communication also lay the foundations for a successful inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

4.4 Inter-religious and intercultural dialogue

‘He who asks questions must be prepared to hear the answers.’

from Cameroon

Development cooperation per se is intercultural interaction, which applies to all phases of the programme cycle. That is why intercultural and inter-religious dialogue are the bread and butter of our daily work. They serve both as a means of communication and as a contribution to the peaceful handling of conflicts between partners or parties of different cultural or religious backgrounds. Inter-religious and intercultural dialogue can also be used strategically as a tool to introduce or promote ideas and values – such as democracy, good governance, human rights.

To ensure a successful inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, the following guidelines⁴¹ must be observed:

- 1) A fruitful dialogue occurs not by different religious and cultural groups presenting their own positions, but rather by reaching out to each other with empathy.
- 2) Radical respect for the difference and equality of the other party is essential.
- 3) Attention must be paid to the existing power imbalances and structural asymmetries and they must be counteracted.
- 4) One’s own standards and values are not universally valid, and they must not be used as a yardstick to measure other cultural and religious beliefs.
- 5) Compare like with like: Don’t compare the ‘best’ of our own tradition with the ‘worst’ of the other religion/culture.
- 6) Clichéd superficial knowledge about the ‘others’ hinders dialogue. What is needed is curiosity, interest and attentiveness.
- 7) The attempt to see the ‘other’ and one’s ‘own’ world with the eyes of the other helps to understand concepts from the inside.
- 8) Disturbances have priority: Blockages, irritations and misunderstandings should be discreetly addressed and integrated into the ongoing process.
- 9) Articulate one’s own feelings and fears and don’t hide behind ‘one/we’ clichés.
- 10) Connecting elements deserve attention, as do specific ‘features’ which differentiate religious or cultural groups from each other.
- 11) Inter-religious and intercultural events demand a lot of tact and skill and must be organised with special attention to cultural sensitivity.

⁴¹ based on: Interreligiöser Think-Tank, 2013: *Leitfaden für den interreligiösen Dialog*. Basel: Dreispitz. See also tool 5. The inter-religious guideline was refined for the policy statement so that it also applies to interculturally sensitive dialogue. Interestingly, only minor alterations had to be made. Other recommended reading: KCRD – Knowledge Centre Religion and Development 2011: *Religion and Development: Practitioners’ Guide*. See Tool 6.

12) A genuine dialogue usually takes a lot of time. Therefore, patience and sufficient time are essential.

4.5 Religion & Culture in quality assurance

'Stories are food for the ear.'

unknown source

The foundation for the integration of cultural and religious factors is an open, respectful and inquisitive=forschend/curious attitude by the respective department heads, programme officers, coordinators and the target population. Such a culturally sensitive attitude can also be called '*faith-literacy*⁴² or '*culture-literacy*' (author's note). The key to quality assurance in the field of *Religion and Culture* is therefore not the use of complex tools, clever questionnaires or quantifiable indicators for measuring outcomes. Rather, developing a professional attitude means devoting the necessary time, interest and openness to get engaged in a – perhaps initially rather diffuse – process. While until now, the local cultural background of the partner organisations and the target population has tended to be dealt with in the form of 'anecdotal episodes' and perhaps touched on in talks during the break, more emphasis should be placed on it in the future.

- **Storytelling:** The first step consists of opening one's eyes to what appears invisible. It is hardly possible to ask directly about cultural and religious influences. Rather, they emerge from observation, the reflection of one's own role, and from case histories. Story-telling is a useful tool for this. It is much easier to use a concrete situation to illustrate the effect of *Religion and Culture* on the project, rather than quantifiable questionnaires or logframes produced by us. Societies with an oral tradition often prefer to package difficulties or conflicts in stories, fables, metaphors or jokes rather than address them directly. It is then up to the listeners or readers to grasp the plot and meaning of these stories and to understand the message they contain. Also, the way in which a story is told, what is presented as the punchline or as the problem, gives attentive listeners an insight into the cultural realities of the partner organisations and the target population. Observing who tells which version of the story also provides information about local power relations. Collecting several stories, from opinion leaders, women and men and marginalised people provides a more complete picture of the project context. The tool of story-telling should therefore form part of every narrative report, mid-term review as well as an element of evaluations. When visiting partners during project trips, it is worth listening to the local stories that tell about changes and difficulties in the project. However, it is not advisable to ask only about success stories. That conveys the impression that difficulties and conflicts imply a failure of the partner organisations and will be interpreted to their disadvantage. Rather, it should be left up to the partner organisations to decide which story best describes the current situation of their project, but they should also be encouraged to talk about difficulties. What is vital during story-telling is that the programme officer and programme coordinator pay sufficient attention to the substance of the stories, ask questions about uncertainties and, if appropriate, adapt the project and programme planning.
- At the same time, a **careful context analysis** must be incorporated in the planning, monitoring and evaluation. In this respect, the question of 'Where and how do *Religion and Culture* play a role in this project?' should be central. It is important to start from the concrete, project-relevant context and not to rely on general statistics or descriptions. The following four questions on monitoring the strategic guidelines can serve as orientation:

⁴² A.-M. Holenstein, at the SDC-FO annual conference 19.06.2013, Bern.

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- 1) What contribution has the country programme made to self-critical reflection, conscientious handling, and a deeper understanding of the subject of *Religion and Culture*?
 - 2) Which religious or cultural factors in the context of the country programme promote sustainable development, and which factors act as a barrier?
 - 3) Has the country programme worked constructively with the potential of *Religion and Culture* in order to positively influence social and political processes?
 - 4) How did it successfully prevent *Religion and Culture* being used for personal, socio-economic or political purposes?

For an in-depth analysis of the cultural and religious context, it is worth consulting the guideline developed by the Kooperationsgemeinschaft 'Religion und Entwicklung' of *Bread for all*⁴³ (see Tool 2).

- Asking the so-called '**magic question**' is a third method: Although we often read project applications and reports under great time pressure, we should take a moment and ask ourselves, when we've finished reading, which question irritated us, surprised us, or was left out of this report. This involves consciously looking for what was left unsaid and invisible, for facts which are taken as given by ourselves or the partners and therefore not deemed worth mentioning anymore, for self-imposed or externally imposed censorship, and for stumbling blocks. The partner organisations will perhaps be initially surprised by such a reading between the lines and posing of unaccustomed questions that may not be directly related to project successes. Over time, however, they will recognise that such respectful communication signals a genuine interest by the programme officer in their locally specific context, and will in future give more space in their reports to cultural and religious issues.⁴⁴
- In future, **field trip reports** should also include a brief reflection on 'the unexpected – stumbling blocks – surprises'. In such a brief paragraph at the end of the report, one's own positioning in a culturally rather alien environment are examined. This looks, on the one hand, at one's own role and conduct in a specific situation, but also at the corresponding reaction of the partner organisation. Possible questions one might ask of oneself are: Was I confronted during the trip with my own religious/cultural identity? If yes, in what way? Did I come across something that was 'alien' to me? Were there any cultural or religious irritations? Were there any 'light bulb' moments? Did I observe or experience a cultural practice that I couldn't understand? Did unexpected cultural or religious commonalities emerge that could be used positively?
- A rich source of information on the integration of *Religion and Culture* are the methodical building blocks of the **Participatory Rural Appraisal** (PRA). Although developed as long ago as the 1980s, the methodology of the PRA⁴⁵ remains very topical. The simple-to-use set of tools is based on a learning process which primarily the so-called 'outsider' will go through. The emphasis is on local knowledge and on the empowerment of the target group. It is based on five central premises:

⁴³ The guideline was mainly produced by Annette Dietschy at the request of the KoGe 'Religion und Entwicklung' of *Bread for all*.

⁴⁴ Esther Imhof even says in this connection that an 'ethics of questions' can be equated with an 'ethics of responsibility', since asking questions means embarking on a serious search for answers and thus also involves taking responsibility (Imhof, Esther 2012: '*Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und Religion*'. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. p. 91).

⁴⁵ The PRA approach was published in 1990 by the FAO: *The Community Toolbox. The Idea, Methods and Tools for Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation in Community Forestry*. (Tool 3).

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- 1) Knowledge is power: The hitherto often unchallenged monopoly of knowledge and power of the 'professional outsiders' is broken. The true experts are the local people.
 - 2) The PRA process transforms the 'external professionals' into learners who respect the local intellectual and analytical capabilities.
 - 3) The creative use of local materials and methods guarantees a geographical and cultural positioning in the local context. At the same time, the adapted methodology ensures that illiterate people are integrated in the process.
 - 4) PRA is a fun approach which can defuse tense or conflictive situations. Nonetheless, it reveals existing power structures, divergent visions of development and areas of conflict in a relative short space of time.
 - 5) Through the enhanced sensitivity inherent in the methodology, vulnerable groups, women, children, the aged, disabled, untouchables etc. are included in the process and are given an equally important role.

For the reasons cited earlier, it is recommended that the programme coordinators as well as the programme officers try out individual methods of the PRA during project visits. The individual PRA tools can be found in the Toolbox under Tool 3.

- Wearing the '**culture lens**' already introduced above is another tool that can be used to deliberately swap one's own perspective with the 'lenses' of the other party. This gives us an insight into the socio-cultural realities of societies in which our projects and programmes are implemented. This conscious change in perspective also allows us to identify influential local power structures and groups, local visions and specific strategies.
- The **do-no-harm** methodology also offers many entry points for integrating the cultural context of projects and programmes more systematically. When carrying out risk assessments of planned projects, it must be remembered that both so-called '*dividers*' as well as '*connectors*' (structures, attitudes and actions, values and interests, experiences and symbols) are to a high degree culturally shaped. Care must therefore be taken to ensure that development projects that pursue implicit goals, as well as those with explicit goals in the religious or cultural sphere, do not have unintended negative repercussions.⁴⁶
- And finally, it is worth mentioning the method of **context mapping**⁴⁷. This makes it possible to take a look, jointly with the partner organisations, at the religious and cultural environment of the project / programme and to visualise it. It not only makes the various actors graphically visible, but also characterises the intensity and quality of the relationships with each other.
- **Culture as method:** Support for specific projects that highlight local art and culture can also help to make a country programme more culturally sensitive. Art and culture can be a way of reaching a large number of people through means they are familiar with. Moreover, cultural forms of expression give an important impetus to social transformation processes and allow access to complex, often taboo subjects. Thus, mobile theatre, team sports, music, photography, filming or writing workshops can be used. And not least, creators of art and culture can be strengthened in their role as 'agents of change'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See Imhof, Esther 2012: *Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und Religion*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. p. 145.

⁴⁷ This and other methodical building blocks can be found in: Holenstein, Anne-Marie 2009: *Schlussdokument: Folgerungen für die Praxis – Methoden und Instrumente*. Berne: SDC, as well as in Tool 4.

⁴⁸ See: GTZ, 2010: *Kultur und Entwicklung*. Eschborn: GTZ. p. 11.

5 Exploitation of synergies

*'The person who works alone, adds up,
Those who cooperate, multiply.'*

from the East

A wide range of actors involved in development cooperation are increasingly concerned about the subject of *Religion and Culture*. Since sharing learning experiences in such a complex field is important, *Fastenopfer* cooperates in networks dealing with these issues and tries to make good use of these synergies.

- In its contact with the **Kooperationsgemeinschaft (KoGe)** of *Bread for all*, on 'Religion and Development', *Fastenopfer* contributes, as an associated organisation, to the internal professional discourse and takes part in consultations on how *Religion and Culture* can be included more systematically in our work. A guideline on this subject has been jointly elaborated, a survey for a 'Faith Identity Analysis' has been prepared and evaluated, and training courses have been organised.
- The **SDC** has for some years played a leading role in the area of *Religion and Culture* with the project 'Role and significance of religion and spirituality in development cooperation'. *Fastenopfer* contributed two case studies to the 2008 SDC study and participated in the discussions on an ongoing basis.
- The RomeroHaus in Lucerne, the Bethlehem Mission Immensee (BMI), the Missionsgesellschaft Bethlehem (SMB) and the Theology Faculty of the University of Lucerne have jointly set up a '**Specialist unit for development science and theology of religion**'. Its aim is to continue and expand the debate about the relationship of religion and development. Various public-sector institutions (SDC, universities) and civil-society organisations (charities – including *Fastenopfer* – PDC-organisations, church actors) are expressing an interest in joining the exchange of ideas and discussions.
- The cooperation with **university institutions** and **colleges of higher education** on the subject has a potential that still needs to be developed. So far, contacts have taken the form of joint events. However, both sides are interested in a closer link between practice and science.

6 Concluding recommendations⁴⁹

*'The world is only as big as the window we
open on it.'*

from Germany

- The knowledge, experience and perceptions of the partner organisations and the target population with regard to religious and cultural factors must be recognised and harnessed/bring to fruition in the programme planning. Local knowledge is a rich source for *Fastenopfer* that must be used. This means that the integration of the cultural dimension at all levels and in all project and programme phases as well as at the institutional level becomes a matter of course.
- The potentials and risks that can result from cultural and religious influences should be observed and critically discussed with the partners, and any consequences for the programme design be drawn.

⁴⁹ Based on the quality criteria of SDC and Holtz, Uwe 2006: *Inter-kultureller Dialog*. In: Einführung in die Entwicklungspolitik. Hamburg: Lit-Verlag. p. 362.

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- The discourse about human and women's rights must not be restricted to normative-legislative aspects. Rather, common denominators must be sought jointly with the partner organisations and the target population, pragmatic solutions negotiated while – as far as possible – respecting local strategies. In this respect, the focus is on finding a consensus on commonly shared values.
 - Monitoring and controlling should go beyond measurable results and also recognise and record the not directly measurable, intended and unintended results, and thus increase awareness of unexpected socio-cultural realities. We must never lose the self-critical awareness that our 'tools' for impact measurement have as a rule a Eurocentric tint.
 - These not directly measurable results and religious or cultural potentials and risks should also be processed for our public-relations work. This means that the subject will gain greater visibility and sensitivity in the public arena.

Time – Respect – Self-reflection – Flexibility: four ingredients for greater cultural sensitivity

- 1) **Time:** Open dialogue and sufficient time are required to enable all participants to present their own needs and goals, and to define a joint approach. Mutual respect, curiosity and tolerance create the basis for cooperation in a spirit of trust. The programme officers, coordinators as well as *Fastenopfer's* partner organisations and target groups must be allowed the necessary time – even if at first glance this would seem to hinder 'efficient' programme management.
- 2) **Respect:** We have no convincing solutions for many problems in our own – familiar – society. So we should be cautious when developing analyses and approaches for measures in contexts that are not very familiar to us. Cultural differences and divergent strategies must be recognised, carefully addressed and respected as much as possible.
- 3) **Self-reflection:** Being clear about one's own religious and cultural identity is a prerequisite for openness. This applies both to individual actors as well as to the entire *Fastenopfer* organisation. At the same time, there is a need on both sides, Western 'donors' and local 'recipients', to critically examine their own background. This will ensure that the subject of *Religion and Culture* does not just become another tool to be put away in a drawer, but resets the context for intercultural cooperation.
- 4) **Flexibility:** The margin between the institutional requirements (e.g. in the form of a PCM) and the local realities and cultural conditions must be explored by all participants in the most flexible and creative way possible. In doing so, there must also be constantly renewed, transparent communication of the fact that *Fastenopfer* is caught between the binding and partly rigid requirements imposed on us by funding bodies, and the demand for cultural sensitivity and flexibility.

7 Glossary and abbreviations

7.1 Glossary

Bias	<i>Tendency or prejudice that lead to a distortion of perceptions, attitudes, results and activities.</i>
Buen vivir	<i>The principle of ‘good living’ puts living as part of a community, according to ecological, cultural and social standards, at the centre of its philosophy.</i>
Culture	<i>Culture is the fabric of meaning in which humans entangle themselves and thus includes everything that people themselves create and produce.</i>
emic	<i>Perspective from inside a society; seeing it ‘with the eyes of an insider’.</i>
Empowerment	<i>Empowerment describes both the process of self-empowerment as well as the professional support of people to overcome their feeling of lack of power and influence (powerlessness) and to recognise and use their scope for action and their resources.</i>
Ethnicity	<i>Ethnicity (Greek ethnos ‘[foreign] people’) is a term from ethnology relating to the classification of cultural identities.</i>
Ethnic group	<i>Ethnic group refers to a group of people who are considered to have a collective identity. Criteria can include origin, history, collective memory, culture, language, religion, connection to a specific territory or a feeling of solidarity. The term is used in contemporary ethnology instead of terms such as ‘nation’ or ‘tribe’ that have negative connotations – always with the knowledge, however, that such descriptions are constructs and are subject to continuous change.</i>
etic	<i>View of a society from the outside; an etic description is thus one of an ‘observing outsider’.</i>
Etiology	<i>In medicine: the science that deals with the causes or origin of a disease. In medical anthropology, this is understood as local patterns of explanations for diseases.</i>
Gender	<i>Gender refers – in contrast to the term ‘sex’ – not to the biological differences between the sexes but rather to the socially and culturally constructed, learned, different roles and identity concepts assigned to the female and the male species.</i>
Indigenous groups	<i>Indigenous groups are population groups who are the descendants of a population that lived in a region before it was conquered, colonised, or established as a state by other groups. Today, indigenous groups often live in marginalised situations and in habitats that are under pressure. They see themselves as autonomous ethnicities and try as much as possible to protect and maintain their specific social, economic and cultural identities and institutions.</i>
Livelihood Approach	<i>Livelihood refers to people’s means of securing the basic necessities of life. In development cooperation, the livelihood approach consists of a comprehensive analysis and holistic capture of the living conditions of</i>

	<i>disadvantaged population groups.</i>
Literacy	<i>'Literacy' refers not only to the ability to read and write, but also to the comprehension of texts and meaning, experiences with the literary and story-telling culture of the respective society as well as capabilities in dealing with the written and spoken language.</i>
Local knowledge	<i>Local knowledge, which covers the practical and interpretative knowledge of a specific cultural group, includes both general, collectively shared knowledge as well as so-called expert knowledge which is reserved to a specific group of people. Collective knowledge is based on a collective memory which is passed on from generation to generation. Local knowledge usually does not exist in written form, but is transmitted orally and by practical example.</i>
Pachamama	<i>A world vision in the Andean region which believes that Mother Earth represents the mother of all being. Today, Pachamama is seen – alongside the religious dimension – as a factor for identity, social resistance and hope for a more holistic life.</i>
Spirituality	<i>Spirituality (from Latin 'spiritus, spirit, breath') in the widest sense refers to the mental aspect of life. In the specific religious sense, spirituality refers to the idea of a spiritual connection to the transcendental, the hereafter, or infinity.</i>
Sumak kawsay	<i>An indigenous concept from the Andes region which strives for the material, social, cultural and religious 'good living' for all members of a community.</i>
Sustainability	<i>Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It identifies three basic pillars: Social, economic and environmental sustainability. The cultural dimension will be integrated as an additional transversal aspect.</i>
Target Economy	<i>An economy that aims for a state of 'having enough'.</i>

7.2 Abbreviations

Cordaid	Dutch Catholic Development Organisation
DC	Development Cooperation
ESC Rights	Economic, social and cultural rights
GNH	Gross National Happiness Index
K4	Jigme Singye Wangchuck, fourth king of the Bhutan dynasty
KoGe	KooperationsGemeinschaft of <i>Bread for all</i>
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OPSI	Office for Psychosocial Issues
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PRA	Participant Rural Appraisal
PDC	Personal Development Cooperation

SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNO	United Nations Organization
WSF	World Social Forum

7.3 Reference to Toolbox

- **Tool 1:** UNFPA 2009: Integrating Human Rights, Culture, Gender in Programming. (Engl.)
G:\EPG\AllgemeinStrategie\02 Konzepte_Evaluationen\Toolboxes\Religion & Kultur\Tool 1 or <http://unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/4106>, UNFPA
- **Tool 2:** KoGe, *Brot für alle* 2013: Kurzer Leitfaden für die praxisrelevante Integration von Religion und Kultur (R&K) in die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (German)
G:\EPG\AllgemeinStrategie\02 Konzepte_Evaluationen\Toolboxes\Religion & Kultur\Tool 2, Leitfaden Bfa
- **Tool 3:** FAO 1990: PRA - The community's toolbox: The idea, methods and tools for participatory assessment, monitoring and evaluation in community forestry. (Engl.)
G:\EPG\AllgemeinStrategie\02 Konzepte_Evaluationen\Toolboxes\Religion & Kultur\Tool 3 or <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5307e/x5307e00.HTM>, PRA
- **Tool 4:** DEZA, Holenstein, A.-M. 2009: Schlussdokument, Folgerungen für die Praxis – Methoden und Instrumente. (German and partly also French)
G:\EPG\AllgemeinStrategie\02 Konzepte_Evaluationen\Toolboxes\Religion & Kultur\Tool 4 or www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_de_178583.pdf, DEZA
- **Tool 5:** Interreligiöser Think-Tank 2013: Leitfragen für den interreligiösen Dialog. (German)
G:\EPG\AllgemeinStrategie\02 Konzepte_Evaluationen\Toolboxes\Religion & Kultur\Tool 5, Interreligiöser Dialog
- **Tool 6:** KCRD – Knowledge Centre Religion and Development 2011: Religion and Development: Practitioners' Guide. (Engl.)
G:\EPG\AllgemeinStrategie\02 Konzepte_Evaluationen\Toolboxes\Religion & Kultur\Tool 6, Practitioners Guide or <http://www.religion-and-development.nl/documents/publications/practitioners-%20guide%20def.pdf>, KCRD

8 Annexe

A) Historical positioning

'We see mistakes others make, to our own we are blind.'

from Morocco

Cultural blindness as a common denominator in approaches to development⁵⁰

If there is anything positive to be found in **colonial theories**, which were used to legitimise the oppression of 'colonised' peoples, it is the fact that at the time, they considered – if in a discriminatory way – the ways of life of the local population.

With the demise of colonialism in the 1950s and 60s, **modernising theories** came to dominate the development discourse. These attributed what they saw as the backwardness of the former colonies mainly to endogenous, i.e. cultural factors. The secular programme of modernisation based on the Western model was launched by US President Truman in 1949 in his second inauguration speech: 'We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.' Technical modernising processes were to replace the 'backward' traditional agrarian cultures together with their religious ideas and lead the 'underdeveloped' peoples step by step into the era of mass consumerism. Thus, technocratic visions of progress and ethnocentric ideas of superiority became embedded in the genes of future development cooperation.

Hence, the modernisation theorists did not take pains to analyse the causes of poverty, let alone interpret them as the consequence of colonial exploitation. Rather, the predominant conviction was that the traditional cultures were hindered in their development because of their cultural heritage and the local emphasis on the sacred. Only few theorists were willing to look more closely and to examine whether the barriers of the sacred to development really exist. A laudable exception is Bassam Tibi⁵¹. He points out that even Islamic fundamentalism can cope perfectly well with the concept of maximising economic growth. So the Quran and the computer are certainly not mutually exclusive, as is clearly shown by urban societies in Riad.

Marxist theories, theories of imperialism and dependency theories of the 1970s have something in common: They, too, largely neglect an investigation of cultural perspectives, are concerned predominantly with economic structures and take them out of their cultural context. Dependency theories deliberately dismiss culturalising trends in order to demonstrate that 'underdevelopment' is exclusively caused by exploitation and not by cultural factors.

The **Bielefelder Ansatz**, also formulated in the 1970s, tried to remedy this deficit and wanted to 'look more closely into these societies'. It produced empirical studies and examined why certain 'European' rationalities are meaningless in other societies, or vice versa. The theory, known as the subsistence perspective, which focuses less on global political macro-structures and more on the direct improvement of the living conditions of the local poor, seemed at first glance to be the breakthrough that included looking more closely at the 'culture of the masses'. But unfortunately, this co-called 'strategy from below'

⁵⁰ A detailed historical overview can be found in Bliss, Frank 2001: *Kultur und Entwicklung. Ein zu wenig beachteter Aspekt in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*. Bonn: IZEP (Informationszentrum Entwicklungspolitik).

⁵¹ Tibi, Bassam 1985: *Der Islam und das Problem der kulturellen Bewältigung der Moderne*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

was also designed, in a purely theoretical way, along Western operational rationales, and mostly without any knowledge of the local context.

Neoliberal development concepts also completely neglect the search for explanations of the causes of underdevelopment and don't analyse the shortcomings of three decades of development cooperation. The more current versions of modernisation theories, which mainly focus on the development of 'human capital', tend to concentrate more on re-educating people away from a cultural milieu that is viewed entirely as an obstacle to development, and turning them into 'modern' individuals who are expected to function according to Western ideas. Here, the mantras of deregulation and opening up of markets are all too often repeated uncritically, without addressing the question of whether the people 'to be developed' actually share the idea of limitless growth. And certainly, no thought is given to the issue of whether, and what negative effects the neoliberal economic system has on people's livelihoods.

In the second part of this Annex, the goal is to counteract the almost systematic suppression of cultural factors. It explores the question of what alternative development concepts could become alternative models to the economically-oriented ideal of growth. It does not in any way want to obscure the fact that alternative development models can also be found in the Christian tradition – for example in the form of Christian social teaching – or in mystic traditions. Nevertheless, the focus here is on presenting alternative concepts with which we are perhaps less familiar. Of particular interest here is the role that culture and religion can play in the search for new paradigms.

B) Alternatives to development

*'Better to stumble slightly on new paths
than to tread the same old paths'*

from China

If one reflects on the phenomenon of development, this mostly involves examining social phenomena in developing countries, seeking reasons for development or underdevelopment, and formulating development strategies. But the gulf between the ethical pursuit of a 'better' world and the realistic view of the modest results still cannot be ignored. While some of the goals set out in the Millennium Development Goals have been achieved, the widening social disparities are becoming ever more evident, especially in the emerging countries. This is happening despite all the efforts towards an alternative development path by promoting concepts such as livelihood, vulnerability, sustainability, self-help. There are now numerous dissenting voices critical of the fact that virtually all approaches make the same basic assumptions around the idea of development, and see these as something existing naturally. These critical voices point to so-called post-development approaches which, instead of advocating alternative development, demand alternatives to development that eschew the development paradigm. This raises a key question: What perspectives are opened up if one excludes the premise normally taken as given – that underdevelopment and development exist?⁵²

The general view today is that one billion people worldwide live in absolute poverty. However, if one looks at this figure from an 'emic' perspective⁵³, some surprising answers emerge. Because many population groups - considered by us as poor – drop out of this category because they would not classify themselves at all as needy and 'underdeveloped'.⁵⁴ On the other hand, one may have to include some hundreds of millions of people who have not been subsumed in the category of the poor, such as

⁵² Goschenhofer, Nina 2009: *Jenseits von Entwicklung? – Überlegungen zu den Postdevelopment-Ansätzen und einer Wissenschaft zwischen Parteinahme und Distanz*. Kollektiv Orangotango (publ.)

⁵³ 'Emic' is a specialist term for a perspective from the inside, in contrast to the 'etic' outsider view.

⁵⁴ Bliss, Frank 2001: *Kultur und Entwicklung. Ein zu wenig beachteter Aspekt in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*. Bonn: IZEP (Informationszentrum Entwicklungspolitik).

government employees with no prospects, or lonely urban dwellers. Of course, such a redefinition of poverty must not be used by the rich countries as an excuse to not meet their moral and financial responsibilities within the context of international solidarity.

There is clearly a need for a new concept of development to replace the paradigm of a purely quantitative goal of linear growth. It is by no means considered a natural law by all people that the quality of development is exclusively determined by capital, labour and knowledge. It is not by accident that a female smallholder in Bangladesh, when asked what 'wellbeing' meant to her, said: 'A full belly, time to pray, and a bamboo structure for sleeping'. This voice is included in the World Bank study 'Voices of the Poor'⁵⁵, which questioned 60,000 people from the poorest population groups in 60 countries about their understanding of poverty and wellbeing. The wide-ranging study showed clearly that most people in the South differentiate much less between material and religious development. Rather, for those affected, development is the path that will lead to the result they want to achieve. Therefore, development differs from culture to culture, from ethnic group to ethnic group, from social class to social class, and indeed from individual to individual. Below, some alternative development models are being presented that challenge our ideas grounded in theories of modernisation.

'Target economy' or economy of 'enough'

*'What you cultivate on the field of your life
is more important than the size of the field.'*

from Africa

Many small farming communities in Africa (and no doubt also in Asia or Latin America) do not recognize the value of work per se. A person works in order to be able to provide daily food for themselves and their family, to meet their social and ritual obligations, to be able to send the children to school and cover the costs of health care. But as a general rule, people don't work in order to put aside savings for future investment. British social anthropologists have coined the term 'target economy'⁵⁶ to describe this attitude. The 'economy of enough' is – as the name indicates – target-oriented. So the amount of work is precisely targeted to what is deemed sufficient in terms of income. In this process, farmers will take into account the size of their plots, consider climate uncertainties and include social needs. Thus, it is perfectly logical to gear the size of the plots to the number of members of a household (as consumers, but also as available labourers). The target economy remains flexible and is continuously adapted to the changing underlying conditions and needs. However, anyone who tries to break out of the system – for example by accumulating above-average wealth – is likely to suffer sanctions, perhaps in the form of harmful attacks through magic. Of course, this has an inhibiting effect on the development of innovations, but it also promotes social stability within a society. In the Western view, development is deliberately hindered by this 'uneconomic approach'. However, given the massive overexploitation of natural resources worldwide, one has to ask oneself whether such cultural 'barriers to development' might not be a more successful strategy in the long term, so that future generations will also be able to use natural resources sustainably.

⁵⁵ Narayan, Deepa et al. 1999: *Voices of the Poor – Can Anyone Hear Us?* Study by the World Bank. Oxford.

⁵⁶ see also Bliss, Frank 2001: *Kultur und Entwicklung. Ein zu wenig beachteter Aspekt in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*. Bonn: IZEP (Informationszentrum Entwicklungspolitik).

Sumak kawsay – buen vivir – good living

'The constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia are documents that want to create new worlds with words.'

Beau Breslin⁵⁷

Sumak kawsay (Quechua), **buen vivir** (Spanish) or **good living** is a central principle of the world view of the indigenous people in the Andes region. Sumak kawsay emphasises the material, social, cultural and religious contentment of all members of the community that must not, however, have a detrimental effect on other members or be harmful to the natural environment. Buen vivir is also a rejection of cultural homogenisation, since it builds on the diversity of cultures by recognising the plurality of the indigenous communities.

The governments of the two materially poorest countries in the Andes region, Ecuador and Bolivia, have had the courage to incorporate in their constitutions for the first time the concept of the 'good life'.⁵⁸ This paradigm change – and the return to their indigenous roots – is also an articulation of the attempt to finally overcome Latin America's colonial past. It is no accident that both in Ecuador and in Bolivia, indigenous people make up the majority of the population. Thus, *sumak kawsay* was enshrined in article 3 of the Ecuadorian constitution in 2008⁵⁹ and set out/noted/argued in concrete points that 'good living' is guaranteed in the form of the right to food, to health, education and water. While these formulations are strongly reminiscent of the human rights of the third generation (ESC rights),⁶⁰ they take these further in that they also integrate the concept of 'Pachamama'⁶¹ and thus the rights of nature. This biocentric view of the world postulates a unity of life that is not marked by the opposition of nature and people. In Bolivia, the concept was incorporated in the constitution as *suma qamaña* (Art. 8, Art. 309). In December 2010, the 'Law for the defence of Mother Earth' was explicitly passed. This made the mother-earth rhetoric known to a wider public, the more so as the Bolivian government used these rights to oppose the compromise at the climate negotiations in Cancun and subsequently adopted a 'Charter on the Rights of Mother Earth' at the alternative climate summit it organised in 2010 in Cochabamba.

The concept gained international prominence when, at the World Social Forum in 2009 in Belém (Brazil), the call for the 'good life' was adopted with the slogan 'We don't want to live better, we want to live well'. At the World Social Forum in 2010 in Porto Alegre, *buen vivir* was discussed for the first time more broadly at an international level and placed in opposition to capitalism and real socialism. Beyond the borders of Latin America, the idea of *buen vivir* in the search for alternative models of development is particularly inspiring because it does not strive to 'have more', but for a state of balance. Sumak kawsay thus represents a multiple break with traditional concepts. Critics of globalisation now discuss the question of whether elements of *buen vivir* may also be relevant for industrialised countries, or whether there is a danger of 'romanticising indigenous ways of life'. However, in the face of the continued predominance of the current economic paradigm – higher, greater, faster, more – it is worth thinking about a 'post-growth society'. The more so because in current debates on development policy, the desire for a good life and happiness is increasingly shining through.

⁵⁷ Breslin, Beau 2009: *From Words to Worlds: Exploring Constitutional Functionality*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

⁵⁸ For a detailed elaboration of the concept of 'Buen Vivir' see: Fatheuer, Thomas 2011: *Buen Vivir. Eine kurze Einführung in Lateinamerikas neue Konzepte zum guten Leben und zu den Rechten der Natur*. Schriftenreihe Ökologie. Band 17. Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

⁵⁹ The spiritual father is considered to be the President of the Constituent Assembly, Alberto Acosta.

⁶⁰ ESC rights are economic, social and cultural human rights.

⁶¹ 'Pacha' is a key term of the Andean cultures. It expresses the integrality of being, and encompasses not only space and time, but also a 'form of life' that overcomes the time-space scheme. 'Mama' is the Quechua word for mother. 'Pachamama' is thus the mother of the world and of being (based on Fatheuer, Thomas 2011: p. 22).

Gross National Happiness in Bhutan

'Imagine wealth and happiness as siblings who climb a mountain, walking hand in hand. There comes the point when the brother wealth continues to climb, and the sister happiness turns around and descends. In Bhutan, the siblings are still at the bottom of the mountain. The aim of politics is to reach the summit together, even if it takes a bit longer to get there.'

from Bhutan

The small kingdom of Bhutan has broken new ground with its adoption of the concept of Gross National Happiness. The term GNH was coined in 1986 by Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth king of the dynasty – also popularly known as K4. In response to a question asked by an Indian journalist about the country's Gross National Product, he said: 'US\$ 50 per capita'. The king was aware of the figure – the lowest in the world. But K4 continued: 'I'm not interested in Gross National Product. I'm interested in Gross National Happiness.'⁶² So the concept of 'Gross National Happiness' was born. For many years, the world ridiculed the king's answer. But today, after the financial, food and climate crises, people are going back to the royal idea. Because what sounded like a lame excuse at the time has been enshrined in article 9 of the national constitution since 2008: 'The state shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.' The incorporation of GNH in the constitution is an attempt to define the standard of living in a holistic, humanist and psychosocial way and thus oppose the traditional measure of Gross National Product, a measure that is exclusively determined by monetary value, with an alternative frame of reference. Translated into practical policy, it means on the one hand the promotion and increase of personal satisfaction and contentment, nurturing family relationships, religion, cultural identity and a healthy environment. The aim is for the population's material standard of living to improve in parallel. Because Bhutan recognised early on that Gross National Product is a strange construct – because it also grows if people are hit by a tragedy. It can be seen, for example, that GNP usually rises after natural disasters because reconstruction gives a boost to the economy, but that the human dramas remain unaffected by this.

There is probably no other country that examines the mental state of its citizens as meticulously as Bhutan. In order to be able to take evidence-based political decisions, 55 happiness researchers regularly question 8,000 randomly selected people about their level of satisfaction. Their questionnaires include questions such as 'How much do you enjoy your life?' or 'How frequently do you consider the possible consequences for your karma in your actions?'. According to the researchers' initial results, 40.9% of people in Bhutan live above the happiness threshold. The idea of Gross National Happiness assumes that a balanced and sustainable development of society can only happen through the interaction of material, cultural and religious processes that supplement and reinforce each other. GNH can be imagined as a house with four pillars – preservation and promotion of *Religion and Culture*, conservation of the environment, sustainable and equitable socio-economic development and good governance. Only if all pillars are of equal height does the roof not cave in. In Bhutanese eyes, capitalism is a house with only one pillar – linear economic growth. This house will collapse – sooner or later. To ensure that in Bhutan, all pillars always have the same height, the country set up a Ministry for Happiness in 2008. The *Commission for Gross National Happiness* uses a screening tool to examine each new law, every project and programme as to its happiness compatibility. For example, in 2009, a sawmill was examined closely as to its happiness potential. The investigation showed that while the sawmill brought in a lot of money for the country, it also used up too much land. Consequently, the

⁶² <http://www.zeit.de/2011/49/Kapitalismuskritik-Bhutan>. See also Nestroy, Harald 2011: *Das Mass menschlicher Entwicklung: Bhutan und das Bruttosozialglück*. In: www.fairunterwegs.org.

government closed the sawmill. The government wants to use the same sustainable approach to ensure that tourism is promoted as one of the most important sources of income for the country, but that the environment is not destroyed. For one day of happiness in the small country, wealthy eco-tourists have to pay a sort of spa tax of US\$ 250 a day.

It is indisputable that this state-prescribed happiness must also have its dark side. Thus, the enforced idyll prescribes, for instance, that national dress must be worn at work, and cigarettes and plastic bags are banned. Furthermore, drug consumption and youth unemployment in the capital Thimphu are evidence that not every child is a happy child in Bhutan. One stain on its recent history is the discriminatory treatment and displacement of the ethnic minority of Bhutanese of Nepalese origin in the south of the country, many of whom were deprived of their citizenship in 1989. However, the political elite does not try to minimise these problems and explains: 'We still have to refine the concept of Gross National Happiness.' On the basis of this modesty alone, it is worth paying more attention in future to the idea of 'Gross National Happiness' as an alternative concept of development. Because where universal things such as happiness are concerned, we are surely all quite similar.



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