Challenges of Change
Faith, Gender, and Development

A project of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University

Supported by the Henry R. Luce Initiative on Religion and International Affairs
The Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service

Founded in 1919 to educate students and prepare them for leadership roles in international affairs, the School of Foreign Service conducts an undergraduate program for over 1,300 students and graduate programs at the Master's level for more than 700 students. Under the leadership of its Dean, Robert L. Gallucci, the School houses more than a dozen regional and functional programs that offer courses, conduct research, host events, and contribute to the intellectual development of the field of international affairs. In 2007, *Foreign Policy* magazine ranked the School’s graduate programs first in the nation.

The Berkley Center

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, created within the Office of the President in March 2006, is part of a university-wide effort to build knowledge about religion’s role in world affairs and promote interreligious understanding in the service of peace. Through research, teaching, and outreach activities, the Center explores the intersection of religion with four global challenges: diplomacy and transnational relations, democracy and human rights, global development, and interreligious dialogue. Thomas Banchoff, Associate Professor in the Department of Government and the School of Foreign Service, is the Center’s first director.

The Luce/SFS Program on Religion and International Affairs

Together with the Mortara Center for International Studies, the Berkley Center is implementing a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation’s Initiative on Religion and International Affairs to the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. The Luce/SFS Program on Religion and International Affairs convenes symposia and seminars that bring together scholars and policy experts around emergent issues. The program is organized around two main themes: the religious sources of foreign policy in the US and around the world, and the nexus between religion and global development. Topics covered in 2006–08 included the role of evangelicals in US foreign policy, religious responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis, and links between religion, migration, and foreign policy in the United States and Europe.

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This report addresses the relationship between faith, gender, and development in the world’s poorer societies. It explores social changes that accompany development, taking religion as a lens, and focusing on how women observe, understand, and influence these transformative processes. Religion is an important factor shaping communities’ norms and aspirations for women and girls. It can be a catalyst for action to improve women’s lives, or it can be a source of conflict and a brake on change. Modernization challenges traditional norms in profound ways, none so significantly, perhaps, as the relationships between men and women. That in turn challenges religious institutions and even practices and beliefs. This report explores relationships among religion, gender, and the international development agenda, asking first what we know and what we do not, and second what seem to be the emerging issues and debates.

The report is designed to encourage dialogue and further study of a wide range of issues—including health and education, livelihood strategies, legal frameworks, and decision-making roles—relating
to women, religion, development, and social change. While these individual topics are the subject of extensive research and policy action, the connections among them—how each dimension views, interacts with, and shapes the others—have yet to be studied in depth.

Two primary assumptions serve as the foundation for the project. First, women play vital and unique roles in the process of social change; because women and issues affecting women are still marginalized in many ways, specific and sharper attention to these roles can help in overcoming disadvantage and improving women’s welfare. Second, women’s roles in the religious sphere are insufficiently appreciated. In virtually all societies, women are deeply engaged with religion, and this affects social choices and action; women also play critical roles in maintaining religious traditions and in championing progress.

Contemporary global trends make this discussion particularly relevant. Growth in religious adherents appears to be outpacing population growth in developing countries; global attention has turned to religion as a significant issue for international development agendas; and women’s participation in religious practice across many dimensions appears higher than their male peers, particularly in poorer communities and those affected by conflict. Literature and scholarship continue to highlight the central relevance of women to equity, growth, and development.

This report examines progress and examples of best practices, where religion appears to be a positive force advancing women’s rights and welfare. It also explores tensions, difficulties, and gaps in knowledge and understanding. The report highlights individual stories and experiences that contribute to our understanding of the processes and issues at work. We have gathered perspectives from development practitioners, female leaders, individual organizations, and leading researchers. Our goal is to illuminate the major issues and provide a framework for understanding them, so that the joint issues of religion, gender, and development receive greater attention and engender a more purposeful dialogue.
Religious communities are critical players in the world of global development, but we know relatively little about their activities. The Luce/SFS Project on Religion and Global Development is devoted to closing this knowledge gap. It explores the role of religious groups and ideas in donor and developing countries and points to areas for greater religious-secular cooperation in the development field. The project supports faculty and student research and publications, development-related courses, and online databases that capture the activities of religious actors engaged in development activities worldwide.

This report is one in a series designed to illuminate the little-understood role that religious actors play in global development. The Religious Literacy series provides an overview of the activities of religious actors around a particular issue area, in this case, women and gender. Subsequent reports will examine topics including children, shelter, and education. The series as a whole will deepen our knowledge of faith-based engagement in development issues, provide an overview of challenges and opportunities, and point the way forward.
Abbreviations and Glossary

**ADRA** Adventist Development and Relief Agency  
**AEE** Africa Evangelistic Enterprise  
**CBO** Community-based organization  
**CGJR** Center for Global Justice and Reconciliation  
**DFID** British Department for International Development  
**FBO** Faith-based organization  
**FGC** Female genital cutting  
**GDI** Gender-related Development Index  
**GEM** Gender Empowerment Measure  
**GPIW** The Global Peace Initiative of Women  
**IMF** International Monetary Fund  
**NGO** Non-governmental organization  
**PRSP** Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper  
**SFCG** Search for Common Ground  

**UNAIDS** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS  
**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme  
**UNICEF** United Nations Children’s Fund  
**UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund  
**URI** United Religions Initiative  
**WCRP** World Conference of Religions for Peace (Religions for Peace)  
**WEF** World Economic Forum  
**WFDA** Women’s Faith and Development Alliance  
**WFDD** World Faiths Development Dialogue  
**WHO** World Health Organization  
**WLIF** Women Leaders’ Intercultural Forum  
**WRG** Women, Religion, and Globalization Project; a Yale University program

Acknowledgements and About the Authors

**Vanda de la Mata** and **Alex Thurston**, Berkley Center fellows, contributed to parts of this report. **Brady Walkinshaw** and **Melody Fox Ahmed** provided valuable comments and support.

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Introduction
Framing Issues and the Report

This report explores the nexus and overlap of three distinct topics: how development institutions approach women and gender, gender issues within religious traditions, and the relationships between issues and actors for development and religion. Each of these three topics is the subject of extensive literature, a plethora of institutions, and often sharp debates. However, the nexus where they come together is surprisingly barren of both scholarship and policy discourse. This reflects the intrinsic complexity of the topic (women and gender, religion, and development), which is broad in scope, involving many disciplines and regions. It also reflects important disconnects and tensions that have, in many instances, distanced “feminist” approaches and institutions from religious institutions.

Perspectives on both gender and development issues among the vast array of institutions inspired by faith are as diverse as can be imagined. They run the gamut from the ultra conservative, seeking preservation of or return to ancient traditions and teachings about life and gender relations, to radically new visions of what society and relationships could and should become. However, within the institutions working in the field of international development, there is, in contrast, something that approaches a broad consensus about the central importance of women in development work and modernization, linked in good measure to contemporary understandings of human rights. This understanding is country specific and grounded in international law, research on development experience, and lessons emerging from practice. Equality between women and men is widely seen today as central to meeting the goals of development work through social change. But this consensus is less robust than it appears on the surface. The common language of gender equality can sometimes obscure important contested areas around international development. The issues at stake deserve a sharper look, particularly a view through the lens of women, faith, and development, because they pose fundamental questions about the shape of future societies and what constitutes equity in the contemporary world.

The recent Breakthrough Summit at the Washington National Cathedral on April 13–14, 2008 aimed to bring these three strands together. The Summit focused on the issue of global poverty, and its theme was “Women, Faith and Development.” This report’s primary purpose was to serve as a background document for the Summit, tracing and highlighting especially relevant literature, research, and experience, sketching the landscape of institutions involved, and highlighting a representative sample of issues under discussion, particularly those with a policy dimension. The report is presented with the full recognition that it covers only fractions of available knowledge about the overlapping topics, intellectually, and more significantly, of the work of preachers, scholars, and activists in the field. Given its scope, the task is approached with a healthy dose of humility.

This report is a desk review that draws on available literature and preliminary consultations with a range of leaders in the field, some of whose voices are reflected in the report. It also draws on the authors’ knowledge and experience, especially their work on development issues and development-faith connections. Inputs from several leading thinkers and practitioners are presented in a series of boxes, alongside short “case studies” that encapsulate relevant experiences.

The report is addressed to a broad audience, of scholars,
activists and what are often referred to as “people of faith.”
Through this link to the April Breakthrough Summit, the report helped to generate ideas and reactions by framing issues and identifying additional areas for investigation to further dialogue and analysis. The report also is part of the broader Berkley Center database work (http://berkley center.georgetown.edu/), a resource for those interested in issues of religion, peace, and world affairs.

The report itself includes a brief review of relevant aspects of the three separate “fields” that come together in the faith/gender/development nexus, followed by an exploration of issues emerging and ideas on future work. The heart of the report is a review of current literature and the work of different organizations. The report also points to parallel efforts to investigate similar themes.

Notable among these are the Religion and Development Research program, financed by the British Development Agency (DFID) and implemented by the University of Birmingham, and Yale University’s Religion, Women and Globalization Initiative which, like this report, is supported by the Henry R. Luce Foundation (Box 1). Under the Birmingham project, scholar Emma Tomalin has prepared an annotated review of existing literature on the topic of women, religion and development, whose conclusion is very similar to this review: that while the separate components are each the subject of a rich literature, remarkably little purposeful attention has gone to issues at the intersection of the three.
The Women, Religion and Globalization Project (WRG),
http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/wrg/, is a collaboration between Yale University’s MacMillan Center, the
Yale Divinity School, and Women, Gender and Sexuality
Studies at Yale, funded by the Luce Foundation. The
WRG is an interdisciplinary, teaching-centered pro-
gram that moves beyond approaches to international
affairs that focus on crisis and conflict and on tradi-
tional “citizenship” accounts of political participation,
towards a model that embraces more phenomeno-
logically fluid and culturally inclusive understandings
of the roles played by “religion” and “women” in con-
temporary global life.

WRG explores, from a variety of angles, the relation-
ship between women religious practitioners and politi-
cal, economic and social developments, and the impact
of these relationships on international affairs. At the
core stands an image of women living religion. By
focusing on women’s religious lives in all their multi-
faith diversity, the WRG aims to understand better not
only how the present-day forces of globalization are
affecting them, but also how their religious practices
affect the context within which international affairs
takes place. In particular, WRG seeks to explore how
the micro-level daily practices of religious women
(practices such as local health care traditions, marriage
and child-rearing patterns, food preparation, sexual
attitudes and behaviors, and subsistence labor) impact
the national and international arenas. The hope is that
a better understanding of the political, economic, and
social significance of such practices—particularly when
they are religiously-inflected—cannot help but deepen
our understanding of what motivates and funds social,
economic, and political interactions at the international
level and help to construct models for integrating
women and religion into international and area stud-
ies in ways that will be useful to future generations of
students, scholars, and analysts.

The WRG efforts include a Yale faculty forum, grad-
uate level courses on women, religion, and global-
ization, public lectures and conferences on those
topics, support for a Women Living Religion and
Women in International Relations Fellow as well as faculty and graduate/professional student sup-
port for research and internships. The program is
led by principal investigators Cheryl Doss, Lecturer,
International Affairs and Economics; Associate Chair,
International Affairs Council; Serene Jones, Titus Street
Professor of Theology, Divinity School; Acting Chair,
Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; and Laura
Wexler, Professor of American Studies, and Professor
of Women’s Gender & Sexuality Studies.

This report has followed several threads in exploring
the topic. First, gender is a fundamental but often
unarticulated aspect of how development issues are
approached within faith communities and institutions.
Second, particular sensitivities around gender issues
often produce polarized views on the topic among
international development specialists and leaders
from faith communities and can lead to avoidance
of certain sensitive topics (especially reproductive
health). And third, a remarkable array of work and
approaches by faith organizations to improving wom-
en’s lives does exist but it is little researched and little
heralded. A reminder is also in order that religion, cul-
ture, and gender are frequently entwined in complex
ways in processes of social change, and thus in areas
that affect and shape development activities, lending
additional difficulty to the task at hand. For all these
reasons, exploration and dialogue around these issues
deserve a high priority.
If the development field is seen as dating from the post-World War II period, then its early decades were marked by a notable silence on the distinctive roles that women and gender more broadly played in the processes of social and economic development. This was mirrored, and linked in important ways, to the virtually absent role of women in leadership of development institutions and programs in their foundational years: early literature barely mentions women and photographs of participants at meetings (for example, the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference where the Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were agreed upon) show graphically the dominance of men. Data collected was rarely, if ever, disaggregated by gender. It was tacitly assumed that development benefits would accrue to all, including women.

There is broad global consensus that international goals of promoting development and reducing poverty can only be achieved by focusing strongly on women and gender equality. This focus is reflected in international development goals such as the Beijing Plan of Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

This picture has changed dramatically, with most observers tracing the breaking point to the early 1970s. Today, development institutions rely on strategic frameworks that highlight their attention to gender in combating poverty. For many institutions, gender is an almost universally acknowledged element in development strategies, from education and health, to environment, to microfinance, and to community development. Currently most development institutions count significant numbers (though almost always a minority) of women among their staff and leadership cohorts. A plethora of dedicated institutions work specifically with women, on advocacy (such as Equality Now), action (such as the Global Fund for Women), dialogue (such as The Global Peace Initiative for Women) and research (such as the International Center for Research on Women). A rich literature documents issues, achievements, and gaps.

The story of this transformation of thinking amounts to a succession of paradigm shifts, propelled by the broader social transformations of recent decades. In the case of the development profession itself, political pressures, personal leadership, community pressure, and the force of evidence from experience have combined in complex ways. Different analysts, including those who were present and played roles through this period of change, present the evolution and its causation with different nuances, but there is no dispute that the field of development has a radically different face today than in it did in the late 1960s.

At the heart of the transformation is the understanding of gender equality as a right intrinsic in itself and an appreciation that women’s rights are an important benchmark for a successful society. It is widely understood that the roles that women play in societies have a marked impact on future generations. Mary Robinson, who served, among other positions, as the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner, articulates in Box 2 the essence of this vision. Substantial research and experience document powerfully the links between overall welfare of families and societies and women’s education and empowerment. More recently, development practice has treated gender not only as a source of disadvantage, but also as an asset for areas from conditional cash transfers to micro-credit.
The literature review undertaken for this report (Annex 1) highlights a segment of the major pieces of research in the field and which also highlights different historical markers. Notable among these markers are the formative United Nations meetings that focused on issues for women, especially the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women. Substantial research and experience has powerfully documented the links between the overall welfare of families and societies and women’s education and empowerment.

An important summary set of indicators of women’s welfare are two indices that form part of the Human Development Report issued annually (since 1995) by

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**BOX 2**

**Women, Rights, and Global Challenges**  
*Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, Realizing Rights*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which marks its sixtieth anniversary this year, is clear and unambiguous in affirming the equal rights of men and women in all spheres. As Article 2 states: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” But it is a sad reality today that in many parts of the world women’s situations are far from equal. And the obvious material gaps—food, water, health, education—are intricately tied to the civil and political gaps. Nothing is more important to bridging these gaps than strong leadership combined with the force of citizen diplomacy.

In my current work at Realizing Rights, my colleagues and I support dialogue among different world views by connecting women leaders who are committed to bringing about a more secure and just world. The impetus for this work arose from a simple reality: the women leaders we know believe they have much more in common than that which divides them from their colleagues on the other side of any cultural or political divide. They also believe that lending their voices and views to policy discussions on global security is critical to actually achieving it.

The Women Leaders Intercultural Forum (WLIF), officially launched in September 2006, is a multi-year joint initiative of Realizing Rights and several high profile partners. Through intercultural, intergenerational, and intersectoral processes this network of leaders aims to ensure that a necessary diversity of perspectives is incorporated into global policy discussions. WLIF has since partnered in November 2006 with the Arab Strategy Forum, a gathering of some 500 influential leaders from business, government and civil society with specific emphasis on the Arab world. The partnership dovetailed with the WLIF’s overall ambition to increase the participation of women leaders from all over the world in discussion of global policy across multiple sectors.

In July 2007, 70 women leaders from the African continent, Muslim and Christian alike, gathered in Nairobi to articulate their common security priorities for the region. Their pointed suggestions were fed into the agenda of the November 2007 International Women Leaders Global Security Summit, where 75 women leaders from around the world—including current heads of state and government, officials from international organizations, the private sector, foundations and civil society—met in New York City. They launched a process to act more collectively to resolve the crises of our world, to forge a practical working link with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her government in Liberia during 2008/9 and to bring about needed shifts in policy in different regions that increase human and state security. The work continued at a regional meeting in Amman, Jordan in December 2007. The WLIF project is still new, but it has made it clear that women leaders are well equipped to bridge the divides of our world. Their agenda-setting power is also necessary to achieving sustainable solutions that reflect truly common priorities.

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*Human Development Index


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*Human Development Index
UNDP: the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (see http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/gdi/gem).\(^3\) UNDP’s 2007–8 rankings of countries for the GDI and GEM are reflected in Tables 1 and 2 below. These indices and the rankings highlight three realities: first, for hundreds of millions of women welfare indicators fall far below acceptable standards; second, the ills of poverty, wherever they are present, affect women disproportionately; and third, the situation of women varies widely among different countries.

The field of gender and development has thus evolved from a contested topic to one that has been “mainstreamed” in thinking about development, signifying the ideal that gender analysis and equity should be fundamentally a part of all development work. Women’s successes in many fields continue to transform outlooks. Annex 2 provides links to and brief summaries of an illustrative set of policy statements and institutional arrangements of an array of development institutions. Every development issue has a gender dimension, whether it is the feminization of HIV/AIDS, governance issues, water and sanitation, or the impact of environmental change.

This report’s purpose is not to outline the field of women and development, but to frame some arenas for conversation. The issues at stake range widely, from more ‘classic’ issues of health and education, legal rights, and access to economic opportunities, to special challenges related to women’s special situations, including domestic violence, trafficking, and the impact of conflict and migration. A vast array of work by many organizations underscores what can be accomplished with creative and purposeful focus on practical and cultural impediments to women’s development. Box 3, focusing on how political change affects women in Sierra Leone, is one illustration.

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**TABLE 2 (continued)**

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*Human Development Index

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**Gender equality and the empowerment of women are important not only for achieving gender-specific aspects of the Millennium Development Goals…but also for the attainment of the MDGs as a whole.**

*Development Committee Communique (April 15, 2007)*

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The breadth of issues that affect women directly or that have underlying gender dimensions is significant for the analysis in this report because, however little cited and noted, virtually every topic related to gender roles in development shares facets that links it to religion and culture.

Extraordinary progress has been made in recent decades, and today the strategic focus on women appears strong and uncontested. Nonetheless, it bears noting that many very different observers in the field express concern about a recent loss of momentum for action. The rhetorical commitments to equal rights, to focusing on women, and to pursuing an agenda of empowerment are often not matched by effective, creative, and sustained action. There is still much to be accomplished and a major gap to fill between words and practice.
Women's Participation in Sierra Leone's 2007 Elections: A Case Study

Carole Frampton, Search for Common Ground

Women in Sierra Leone are challenged by different socio-economic factors and cultural norms that limit and discourage their active participation in social development and decision-making. These include male oriented norms and structures that mitigate women’s public participation and include cultural patterns that oppose women’s participation in public life; the lack of political party support for female candidates, particularly in the form of finances and access to political networks; electoral systems that are not conducive to women’s political participation, such as “first past the post” rather than proportional representative systems; lack of coordination, solidarity and networks of women Parliamentarians, women’s groups, and women at the grassroots levels; insufficient mobilization of media support or knowledge on how to use media as a tool, amplified by unsupportive attitudes on the part of the media; illiteracy and lack of education; and self-censorship resulting from low self esteem and weak social support networks to break barriers to participation.

In 2005, Search for Common Ground (SFCG), an international conflict transformation organization, identified the successful election of Liberia’s Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as Africa’s first elected woman president as an opportunity that could be leveraged to engage a broader cross-section of women in decision-making within the West African sub-region. With Sierra Leone’s 2007 national elections on the horizon, SFCG developed a strategy to better engage women and encourage them to actively participate in the upcoming elections, both as voters and as candidates. Supported by a consortium of international donors, this strategy had several different aspects, including challenging perceptions and stereotypes that limit women’s participation; building the capacity of key women who could influence others, including journalists and civil society leaders; and mobilizing a national civic and voter education campaign to ensure that women and other citizens were informed about how to vote and make smart choices about leadership. The tools used included radio programming, television, training, community forums, civil society mobilization, and alliance-building.

SFCG’s research shows that women listen to radio more when they hear women’s voices. SFCG’s has also found that female journalists have greater access women for interviews and discussions in radio programs. Thus SFCG worked with community radio stations around the country to train women journalists in elections-related and civic education programming specifically to target a female audience more effectively. SFCG also deployed a number of women field officers in districts where women’s participation was generally lower in order to engage them more and encourage them to get involved. For example, in Port Loko, a northern district, SFCG assigned an older woman who had experience challenging women’s roles as she had run for public office in her extremely male-dominated community. When she first started asking women to talk about their opinions and experiences on the radio, they were very afraid to do so. Many told her that they must seek permission from their husbands first, while others simply avoided her by telling her they were busy cooking and could not speak now. Yet the Field Officer persisted, and eventually her patience won them over. They began to speak out in a way that was completely unprecedented in the small town. Discussing their issues on the radio, these women slowly began to reverse their ideas of female inferiority, and to understand the important role that women play in society.

With a record high voter turnout of 75.8 percent in the first round election and 68.1 percent in the second round, including 71 percent in Port Loko District, women showed that they could indeed play a positive and participatory role in determining the outcome of the election and the future of their country.
Part II
Women and Faith: Complex Intersections

A different and generally quite distinct field of scholarship and practical activity involves women and faith. The core issues turn around how religious beliefs and institutions affect women and how women engage with religion in all its dimensions. This topic is generally and often quite notably separate from the gender and development field highlighted in Part I, though there are substantial areas of overlap. It is striking how little of the work about women and development touches on questions of religious organizations or beliefs, except in a negative way. In contrast, much work about women and religion does address questions about social change at the core of development programs and processes. Work on the topic of gender and religion spans many disciplines (theology, sociology, history, anthropology, and philosophy for a start). For the purpose of this discussion, we provide only a glimpse into the rich array of relevant writing and research. This section introduces briefly the relevant scholarship, some of the operational approaches and debates, and some examples of how issues play out in practice.

A vast body of scholarship addresses questions about how religious traditions treat women, and the roles of women within different faith traditions. The literature review undertaken for this report (summarized in Annex 1) highlights a few key sources that are in many respects the tip of a vast iceberg of knowledge spanning different religious traditions and cultures, over many years. It highlights work that this report’s authors found particularly pertinent in examining how different religious traditions view women.

Likewise, a wide range of organizations work on women’s issues within the context of broader organizations or, in some instances, dedicated specifically to issues for women. Annex 3 includes summaries of the work of a small sample of these organizations.

These literature and organization reviews form part of the work being done by the Berkley Center to create comprehensive databases on the role of religion in culture, society, and politics. The databases, including one on religion and development, allow users to compare and contrast key events, organizations, and statements made by religious leaders, scholars, and communities.

A brief summary of themes emerging from scholarship about women and religion is provided in Box 4. It is drawn from an overview paper on the topic by scholar Christine Gudorf. Her overview is broad and ambitious and gives a sense of the rich lode of analysis touching on different traditions and academic fields. She reminds us that women’s experiences in religions are diverse as the religious traditions themselves and they are thus difficult to generalize. That said, common themes such as the lack of female leadership within most religious organizations, dearth of strong female role models, and the debate surrounding women’s innate differences from men emerge for all of the major faiths. Gudorf also mentions particular points of contention including domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and son preference, some of which are discussed elsewhere in this report.

Box 5 provides a more specific illustration of the breadth and depth of scholarship on the subject of women, gender, and religion. It presents a specific perspective on the issues arising from research, by anthropologist Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer. Balzer focuses on the difficulties surrounding gender roles in changing societies. Women occupy an interesting position at the intersection of religion and gender and have the ability to serve as cultural mediators. Anthropologists like Balzer examine the cultural complexities surrounding religion and what changing norms mean for women in specific contexts such as Balzer’s own fieldwork in Western Siberia. This
Women’s status in religions is complicated by the nature of religion itself, its diversity, and differing historical experiences, especially in encountering modernity. Religions, as part of culture, are dynamic and diverse, not static or monolithic. Religions help within each culture to explain what is valuable, prioritize values, restrain behavior, and bind communities through ritual in shared identities. Religious messages and structures are reinterpreted to meet the new conditions. Religious treatment of women has changed throughout history, generally and within virtually all religious communities.

In the world religions with global impact (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity), religious elites have been almost exclusively male. Exclusion of women from the formation and transmission of most traditions is a major theme of women scholars. A very few religions have women as the majority of both the leaders and the members; there are some women-founded traditions in the modern period, like Shakerism, Christian Science, and nineteenth-century Spiritualism.

Across many cultures, great traditions dismissed women as being not religious at all, or as less religious than men, or, when women were religiously active, as being more unorthodox than men, inclined to engage in magic and superstition or outright heresy. For example, in Muslim Morocco, women are thought to be less religious than men because they seldom enter the mosque, which is considered to be male space. Some religions, such as Hinduism and Judaism, created, or allowed women to create, female domestic ritual within the larger tradition.

Sacred texts touching on the nature of women differ widely but most highlight the purpose of women and their function in society as wives and mothers, under the protection and control of men. Women are generally defined in terms of their physical differences from men. The leadership of men is another general theme in sacred texts, with various reasons given, including God’s preference, women’s punishment for the original sin of the first parents, Adam and Eve, the economic dependence of women on men, and the common notion that women need to be protected from predation by “other” men, as well as from their own feminine irrationality and hyper-emotionality. Men are presented as rational and cool-headed but at the same time unable to control sexual desire.

Sacred texts highlight stories of extraordinary women but rarely as exemplars of female nature. In the Jewish scriptures, Rebecca, Deborah, Judith and other independent women exercised sound judgment on behalf of a whole people. In Christianity, specific women are named as prophets, apostles, deacons and heads of churches, even of the Greco-Jewish church in Jerusalem itself. The Quran depicts men as the “managers of the affairs of women,” (4:34) but some women were warriors in the early battles of Islam. A’isha, the youngest of Mohammad’s wives, was responsible for contributing many of the hadith about Mohammad’s deeds and words. In Hinduism, at least three women are credited with writing parts of the Rig Veda.

The issue of son preference has special importance today as it is driving major changes in sex ratios in several societies (aborting girl fetuses or infanticide). Son preference is strong in Hinduism, Chinese religions, and others. An issue essential to improving women’s welfare, across all religions and cultures, involves a woman’s right to control her own body: to consent to marriage; to accept, reject or request sex in marriage; to have freedom from both physical and sexual abuse inside and outside of marriage; to control her own childbirth; and to control her own reproduction. Of these rights, most religions have recognized only a women’s right to consent to marriage, and even this right is not fully implemented in parts of the world.

Religious teachings influence enduring cultural attitudes about violence against women. Changes from extended family households to nuclear family households, the mobility of nuclear families away from relatives and friends, and the increased anonymity of urban settings, as well as male fear of losing control of women, combine to increase domestic violence and public attacks on women, including gang-rape.
kind of anthropological fieldwork can often give voice to women in a way that other disciplines sometimes ignore. A summary conclusion is well reflected in the concluding sentence: “Winners (often men) write history, sometimes in stone, but anthropologists search in the cacophony of diverse, especially less privileged voices (often women).

As Balzer suggests, women, more so than men, play complex roles both as religious actors and as the recipients of religious action. Many scholars studying women and religion have found that due to a number of cultural factors women tend to be more religious than men in many societies. Both academic literature and surveys indicate that women report a stronger personal faith, stronger commitment to orthodox beliefs, and more active participation in religious events and rituals. In most cultures women are perceived as the bearers of tradition, and it is often their responsibility to maintain religious belief and participation.

Explanations for women’s religiosity are varied. They frequently intersect with analyses that delve into questions of ethnicity, culture, and social class. Many people look to how women are socialized as a partial explanation for their relatively high religiosity. Some hold that women are socialized early on to be passive, submissive, obedient, and self-sacrificing. Another explanation is based around socially constructed gender roles. In Western societies, religion is often seen as relegated to the private sphere and separate from the masculine, public sphere of the economy and wage-labor. Religious participation is then seen as an extension of a woman’s role as nurturer and caregiver, and part of family life.

Considerable research also suggests that conventional wisdom can be misleading or at best simplistic. For example, one recent analysis (2008) highlights that data from the World Values Survey in fact indicates that the reality of gender linked religiosity is quite complex and varies by society. An interesting link associates aspects of religious practice with perceptions of risk and security. The gender gap in religiosity may be less about sex and more about the many vulnerabilities and uncertainties in women’s lives.
Women are at the crux of changing values concerning religion and gender, reform and social change, including religious and secular fundamentalism. As social changes transform communities in widely differing societies, women are redefining practical and intellectual categories and issues. Religion is a central part of the change process, as women engage in a selective blending of local and world religions in ways that transcend conventional descriptions.

Women resist, conform, and negotiate their way through values that have alternately placed them on pedestals and brought them down to earth. They are crucial cultural mediators: they can be (literally) spirit mediums but far more often they are practical translators of beliefs into practice. Thus, they stand metaphorically at the juncture of religion and gender. Relevant issues include local definitions of “purity and pollution,” women’s leadership, and sexism. New approaches emerge as women have integrated daily religious practice, ancient folk wisdom, and increasing awareness of international norms.

A significant question that is rarely asked is whether tensions about appropriate gender roles are central or peripheral to the formation of religious canon. When is gender salient? How can analysts navigate and understand the multiple ways that women, as religious actors and potential sacred power holders, are portrayed and portray themselves? We need a commitment to subtlety and an open mind. Gender roles, including within each religious tradition, are changing. Power issues are linked to socially embedded perceptions of gender. We increasingly see a selective blending of local world religions in ways that transcend conventional descriptions.

Early anthropological studies of the juncture of religion and gender looked for roots of religion in ancient matriarchies and fertility rituals. Today such deterministic assumptions are outmoded. But insights and lessons can be drawn from the “roots” of cultural practice. The complex cultural logics that underlie restrictions on women’s behavior, often based on perceived danger-laced concepts of ‘female impurity,’ are an example.

My fieldwork in Western Siberia, with Ob-Ugrian Khanty (Ostiak), illustrates social tensions expressed in elaborate attention to ‘female impurity.’ Pre-Christian beliefs and behaviors survived yet transformed during Russian Orthodox proselytizing and Soviet secularization. Indigenous women negotiated their way into greater power and authority as they grew older, past the age of fertility and menstruation, and into a life cycle stage where they could become ‘old and sacred.’

In a separate instance, a ‘teach-in’ on Islam at Georgetown University after 9/11 included a gender-segregated group prayer. Some were upset that women had been forced to pray behind the men. ‘No,’ explained the female president of Georgetown’s Muslim Student Association, ‘we want it that way, just as we wish to wear head scarves: to show our modesty, and through this, our purity of purpose.’ While the sincerity of these perspectives shines through, potential for abuse exists. Focus on female purity encourages strict rules in the name of ‘custom’; uneven enforcement of deviance can lead to its social mitigator, hypocrisy.

In many European cultures the strongest assumptions of religious conservatives concerning appropriate female roles lie in the significance of women as sacred mothers producing children for a homeland quite literally defined as a Motherland. The Eastern Orthodox Church canon emphasizes Mary as the Mother of God over images, icons and ideals of the Virgin Mary. In India, women’s fertility is a core value of Hindutva, Hindu nationalism, and an important symbol of Mother India’s purity and prestige.

Anthropology provides insights into ways that streams of folk religion mingle into mainstream religions, especially into Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism. Tensions between the old and the new seem to ebb and flow. The river metaphor, however, has limits since continuities of traditions, against many odds, are also found. Focus on specific power relations...
enables the concepts of ‘tradition’ and ‘great tradition’ to become matters for query and specificity. Precisely by using the lens of gender relationships, core values are revealed within changing religious ideologies. The sometimes chafing ways these ideologies play out in actual human lives are illustrated, as women ‘negotiate’ change and also live with constraints. We learn not only what is negotiable or re-formable, but also where and how conservatives, including female conservatives, prevail.

Old debates that helped jump-start gender studies, concerning mythic matriarchies, mother goddesses, ‘third sex’ phenomena, or domestic/public gender divisions have been superseded in favor of cultural complexity. We can no longer generalize about women as relatively more ‘natural’ (read emotional) and men more ‘cultural’ (read logical) when we see diverse streams of customary and religious law that emerge from specific relationships between men and women. Comparing ‘traditions’ helps us realize that gender distinctions derive more from the political hegemonies of particular groups than from the purity of particular sacred texts.

Winners (often men) write history, sometimes in stone, but anthropologists search in the cacophony of diverse, especially less privileged voices (often women).
A further, widely noted observation is that while women may be more religious than men, the majority of leadership positions in nearly all organized religions are held by men. The pattern extends beyond clergy to leaders of religious groups and organizations. While women participate in greater numbers than men, they often lead in far fewer numbers than might be expected.

In discussions about issues of gender and religion, considerable attention has been focused on two major faiths with pronounced, if highly complex teachings and traditions about gender relations: Islam and the Roman Catholic Church. In the four pieces that follow, different individuals explore the roles of women within the religion and why some might be drawn to religious orthodoxy or oppose it.

Zainab Salbi, founder and president of an operating and advocacy organization for women (Women for Women International), discusses in Box 6 why Muslim women might find religious fundamentalism more appealing than the alternative. She counters images of women as docile or complacent, they work through systems to benefit from “patriarchal bargains.” Many women find more protection from traditional systems than from the modern state. She argues, however, that for such protection to be of real benefit, religious laws and traditions will need to be redefined.

Box 7 by Ingrid Mattson addresses a tension that many have noted in negative responses by Muslim women to seemingly well meaning interventions from “western” women and women’s organizations. She highlights a number of difficulties surrounding western scholars who purport to speak for Muslim women. On the one hand people in the West can give voice to the concerns of women living under oppressive regimes. On the other hand, scholars are often quick to label something oppressive without fully considering the importance of the tradition or practice in the lives of the women they seek to help. A perspective with interesting contrasts is presented by Daisy Khan, but there is a common theme in both arguments, which supports true empowerment of Muslim women and efforts to hear their voices. [See boxes 7 and 8.]

The fourth piece focuses on the sensitive and at times contentious issues surrounding the role of women in the Catholic Church. It describes the important encyclical issued in 2004 that specifically addresses relations between men and women in the context of the Church, and provides an illustration of some commentaries which question the official Church positions. [See box 9.]

The perspectives highlighted above focus on both theology and on “lived” and “living” religion. In exploring links to development issues, practical dimensions come to the fore. Three short narratives below highlight a range of issues and cases to illustrate approaches to women in religion. Each story describes a set of complex issues involving women and religion at the level of practice.

The first two cases explore issues that touch on the roles of women in Muslim societies, with messages about both the significance of change and avenues that offer promise for reform efforts. In both boxes the work of local women and organizations in advocating for women’s rights is of central importance. The first describes community-based programs aimed at improving women’s welfare particularly through education about health and female genital cutting. The second describes the bold reforms in family law in Morocco which have been enacted following careful collaboration between religious and secular groups and schools of thought. [See boxes 10 and 11.]

The third box describes ongoing work led by global faith-based organizations to combat trafficking, especially in women. It highlights the breadth of the campaign, its conscious effort to engage a wide range of groups, and its tight links to education. [See box 12.]

All three of these stories (which are a tiny fraction of those available) highlight the importance and challenges involved in negotiating religious and cultural practice to advance women’s rights. The meaning of equal rights for women, however much it is enshrined in international law and official rhetoric, is still debated and contested in many circles, highlighting the importance of dialogue and engagement. The cases also demonstrate how, through the thoughtful and persistent work of local communities and international organizations, change can take place.
Why Women Might Support Religious Fundamentalism
Zainab Salbi, President, Women for Women International

The emergence of religious fundamentalist movements in many parts of the world is the result of a variety of historical and socio-political processes. By examining women’s attraction to the Islamic revivalist movement in the Middle East general themes emerge which are applicable in other countries albeit within their own unique religious and cultural contexts. Contrary to popular beliefs of Muslim women as complacent and docile, in supporting Islamic fundamentalist movements women in the Middle East operate as active agents seeking to advance their own interests through the revival of religious traditions.

The confinement of religion to the private sphere in many states around the world is a common theme shared by different religions in different contexts. Despite the fact that women and men are viewed as equal citizens in the public sphere, this sphere is viewed as masculine in the manner in which it is reflected in socio-political and economic realities. Religion’s position in the private sphere gives it unique significance to women. When many countries adopted a modernizing agenda after colonialism, women found that such agendas utilized the same patriarchal movements they were supposed to fight and were only related to the public sphere, leaving the private sphere untouched.

Finding themselves constrained between the limitations of the public sphere controlled by the state and the private sphere controlled by religion, women find themselves having to enhance their position through “patriarchal bargains.” Through this process women seek to increase their security by engaging in bargaining that may lead them to sacrifice certain rights. Women in the Middle East may view bargaining with the religious movement as a more viable option than with the state. Religion provides promises for a comprehensive protection or improvement for women’s position in society.

Religion offers motherhood a safe and stable position in Islamic society. Motherhood provides a positive and assertive identity among women and a sense of self-worth from which various forms of oppression can be challenged. Through challenging oppression new strengths and capacities may be developed. Additionally, in times of instability, poverty, and economic insecurity women may find a return to traditional Islamic society with pre-defined gender roles as offering more options than provided by the state. The value of their role is not determined by their “production” but rather by their control over what is produced.

For example, the widespread adoption of the veil by female Islamists is seen as providing them with an empowering freedom of mobility. The veil has since become the symbol available to Muslim women to counter the unattainable demands imposed by modern and Western values through globalization. The view of the veil in the West was largely colored by Western feminist and colonial images of Muslim women as oppressed and immobile. That Muslim women should adapt that same discourse and transform its meaning to represent Muslim women’s autonomy should not be surprising.

The Islamic revival’s appeals to history and indigenous roots resonate with women who feel alienated and left behind by other imported political ideologies. In searching to advance their interests or to improve their condition within the family and the state, many Islamist women, like women who support different religious movements in various countries, are finding more promise of protection provided by tradition than provided by the modern state. However, for that religious protection to become a reality, religious law and tradition will have to be redefined and renegotiated to reflect modern family structures and needs. Otherwise, the religious promise of security and safety for women will remain a myth.
Advocates of women’s rights in the Western world have important roles to play in supporting Muslim women who are struggling for their rights. This support can be critical in societies where the rule of law, freedom of expression and freedom of the press are limited or absent. Western activists serve as translators or messengers for Muslim activists and can lobby their own governments to put pressure on repressive governments where Muslim women are struggling for their rights.

Problems arise, however, when Western activists act not as “honest interpreters” for Muslim women, but rather reframe the message according to their own beliefs and in conflict with the beliefs of the Muslim women for whom they claim to be advocating. For example, when the Pakistani activist and gang-rape survivor Mukhtar Mai traveled in the United States to speak about the violation of her human rights, she emphasized that the sources of her oppression were illiteracy, government corruption and an ancient tribal caste system. Many of Mukhtar’s “advocates” kept framing her message as that of a woman oppressed by Islam or that of a citizen of a Muslim country, although Mukhtar rejected this interpretation of her situation, highlighting instead the importance of Islam as her source of spiritual strength. Indeed, she pointed to the support of the local religious leader (mullah) as the reason why her case succeeded.

Similarly, problems arise when Western activists insist that certain beliefs and practices that many Muslim women embrace are inherently oppressive. It is ironic that Western women who claim to be interested in supporting their Muslim sisters are unaware of how deeply paternalistic their attitude is. This lack of self-awareness often arises because many women take what they perceive to be oppressive practices or attitudes towards other women personally.

A Western woman who assumes that a headscarf is a sign of the degradation of women feels within herself an urgent desire to get that thing off the other woman’s head. Until that happens, she remains offended and anxious, and often deaf to the other woman’s own interpretation and understanding of her beliefs and practices.

Conversations about women’s rights across Western and Islamic communities are often unproductive because women in Western countries tend to focus on oppression that they see as gender-specific, whereas women in Islamic communities focus instead on different forms of oppression that they see as more urgent—at least when they meet with a group of Westerners.

If feminism is about embracing the full human identity of women, then women’s rights advocates need to hear Muslim women’s full spectrum of concerns, including their perceptions of political, military and economic oppression.

Many Westerners approach the issue of Muslim women’s rights assuming gender solidarity among women. Many Muslim women feel that this solidarity will remain superficial until Western women can address the ways their own economic and political activities are sources of oppression for many Muslim women.

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Muslim and Non-Muslim Women in Cooperation

Daisy Khan, Executive Director, ASMA - Society for Muslim Advancement

Conversations, partnerships, and alliances take place between Muslim and non-Muslim women, and they are making a significant positive impact on the lives of Muslim women. I am a firm believer in the ability—no, the necessity—of women learning from one another, and as Muslim women, we can greatly benefit from the historical and contemporary lessons of non-Muslim women’s struggles, and vice versa. Even today, we share common mandates to enhance the private and public lives of women, to promote their active participation in society, and to reduce domestic violence and poverty. We can discuss these issues and work together as women.

An excellent example of such cross-faith collaboration amongst women was in Liberia, where Christian and Muslim women came together in courageous opposition to former Liberian President Charles Taylor and in support of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. With the encouragement of their mosques and churches, these women of different faiths struggled together for peace and stability in their war-torn homeland. This unity enabled them to create real societal change.

However, this dialogue and partnership has yet to reach its full potential. One of the primary barriers to constructive Muslim-non-Muslim collaboration is the feeling amongst many Muslim women that they have been excluded in non-Muslim work, whether governmental or private, to enhance the position of Muslim women. Those most organized and financially-supported institutions fail to adequately utilize and join forces with Muslim women. Despite the sincerity of these efforts, they often fail to appreciate local environments, and this can, of course, lead to resentment. For example, such groups typically work in spite of Islam, rather than with it, and this absence of religious legitimacy and sensitivity has consistently hindered real social change amongst Muslims. It has frequently placed Muslim activists in the awkward position of defending themselves against accusations of iconoclasm, blind infatuation with non-Muslim ideas, or even a rejection of Islam.

Good work is being done in local contexts, though it frequently lacks sufficient funding or resources to realistically galvanize any sort of viable movement for change. Non-Muslim women should encourage, support, and partner with Muslim women already active on these issues. By listening to and enlisting the Muslim women themselves, this collaborative approach ensures that those women most affected by any potential change are the ones defining their society’s needs and determining the most appropriate responses. Without their critical involvement, well-intentioned and potentially effective work can become little more than an insensitive imposition.

Empowering Muslim women to full participation in their communities and nations is an extremely important task, one that necessitates our collective effort. As Muslim and non-Muslim women, we must continue to work in concert for the betterment of all women in our communities. This cooperation is undoubtedly the first step. I have witnessed the power of collaboration in my own activism with WISE (the Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity), a project made possible only by the moral and resource support of non-Muslim women. These women strengthened and encouraged us, and we learned from their parallel trajectories. As a result, WISE is now poised to support the efforts of Muslim women around the globe.

Though the global community of women is ideologically and religiously diverse, we can agree on certain principles and join together in specific shared struggles. As Muslim women, we welcome this support.
On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World: Impact and Response

Given its special global position, the views of the Catholic Church on issues of women and religion elicit wide discussion. Therefore the July 31, 2004 letter issued by Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), entitled “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” is of special significance. The letter provided a religious analysis of gender roles and set out concrete recommendations for the present time.

The letter noted fundamental differences, mental and physical, between men and women in the Church and world. It takes issue with “modern feminism” for causing antagonism between the sexes and attempting to eliminate the differences between men and women.

The letter calls for an active collaboration between the sexes in “recognition of the difference between man and woman.” It underscores the fundamental nature of women and the feminine attributes of nurturing, live giving, caring and a “capacity for the other.” Women are encouraged to participate in public life and to have positions of responsibility in politics, economics, and social affairs.

Reactions to the letter reflect some of the polarization of views that enter the picture when gender and religion are at issue. Many commentators described the document as a groundbreaking beginning for a dialogue between people of faith and the church about the role of women. Its critics reacted to what many saw as a misreading of the feminist movement.

One such commentator was Sister Joan Chittister, writing in the National Catholic Reporter. She argued that what the letter describes as feminism in general only applied to a small fraction of the movement in the 1970s. The women’s movement today does not center on women dominating men or behaving exactly like them but rather providing equal opportunities in the public and private sphere for both men and women. Arguing for women as “existing for others” reinforces women’s subordinate role. Collaboration between men and women requires men as well and the letter says very little about what men can do to create a world of equals.

The letter gives little explicit attention to issues that arise for women in development: that is, what the feminization of poverty means for women’s roles, and it does not focus on what could be done to address inequalities that women face around the world.

Despite these issues, the letter has promoted an active and ongoing dialogue between women’s groups and the church regarding women’s roles.

http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/update/bn080204.htm
“To the Experts in Humanity: Since When did Women Become the Problem?” by Joan Chittister, 2/8/04

“Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Inspiration from Example: The Tostan Story in West Africa

Changes in gender roles and cultural practices must ultimately be grounded at the community level. The approach and work of Tostan, an international NGO based in Senegal, which works to address female genital cutting (FGC), offers an inspirational example of what is possible within certain conditions. It also illustrates the complex interaction of culture and religion, local and global, and interests and rights. Tostan’s work starts and finishes with women but engages the full community, including religious leaders and religious beliefs, in creative ways.

Tostan grew from projects launched by its founder Molly Melching, a student and Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal in the 1970s. Officially incorporated in 1991, Tostan has worked with communities in Senegal, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and the Gambia. It has assisted over 1,500 communities in renouncing FGC. Tostan is distinguished by its community-based approach; Africans make up over 99 percent of its paid staff. Tostan gives priority to engaging with marginalized groups but the heart of its philosophy is working with the community to bring change.

Participation is critical. Under the Community Empowerment Program, a Tostan coordinator sets up a classroom curriculum in seven to ten communities within the same region. Facilitators from within these communities lead classes for adults and adolescents that focus on health, hygiene, democracy, and other topics. Facilitators often return to assist in other Tostan projects. Participants agree to “adopt another learner” in their communities, thereby spreading information and encouraging discussion. Tostan offers community members food, transportation, and seed money for small businesses. Communities can join the Empowered Communities Network, a structure which connects them with other communities, organizations, and NGOs.

In Senegal, Tostan also works with the talibes, children who labor for a religious master, or marabout, in exchange for religious training and Quranic teaching. These relationships can lead children into street begging and dire poverty. Tostan provides needed supplies, such as soap, to these children, and works with marabouts to find other sources of income; simultaneously, Tostan organizes within communities to raise awareness of the problem and encourages local families to take responsibility for children. Tostan also lobbies the Senegalese government to tighten legal restrictions on Quranic schools and religious leaders, eventually hoping to deter child exploitation through legal measures.

A unique aspect of Tostan’s work is the practice of Public Declaration, where community members publicly and formally state their commitment to a new path, such as the abandonment of FGC. These collective decisions take on an added measure of effectiveness when announced publicly, Tostan finds, increasing the likelihood that communities will follow through on their intentions to make change.

Tostan’s work has achieved major changes in West Africa and elsewhere, and has demonstrated the effectiveness of community-based approaches. A respectful attitude toward local voices and an emphasis on local decision-making has proved instrumental in achieving these successes. And although some religious groups oppose Tostan in Senegal and elsewhere, the organization has been successful in engaging in meaningful partnerships with many community religious leaders.
The 2004 passage of a new version of the Moroccan family law code, or the mudawwana, marked an important victory for both Moroccan women’s movements and its theologians. The new code expanded women’s rights in fields such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. It created a compelling linkage of religious and secular law and, coming alongside increased political participation and representation for women, signals a major transition in Moroccan society. Morocco’s success in achieving important reforms affecting families and advancing women’s rights was brought about through a highly participatory process involving different sectors, and consciously went about grounding modern reforms on Muslim traditions and religious teachings.

Family law was a source of tension in Morocco even before independence. Attempts to reconcile Islamic law with the perceived demands of modernization led to the creation of the mudawwana in 1957–58. The code “treated a woman as a minor throughout her life” and placed restrictions on her right to work and transact business. Many Moroccan women, feminists, and nationalists were disappointed.9 Decades of activism, as well as pressures of demography, economy, and political liberalization on Moroccan society and the state, led to a serious push to overhaul the code in the early 1990s. This prompted some reforms, but activists saw them as relatively minor. A decade later, however, renewed activism, the support of King Muhammad VI, and the backlash against Islamists after the 2003 Casablanca bombings prompted a reappraisal of the code, leading to real reform. The king introduced a new code, which granted greater freedom to women and children, and the parliament ratified it largely intact in January 2004.10

Women’s participation is still under debate in Morocco, and both conservative and modernizing attitudes contest a range of theoretical and practical matters.
Inspiration from Example: Faith Partnerships to Confront Challenges of Trafficking
Sarah Hidey, World Relief

The horrors of human trafficking span the entire globe—no continent is immune from the injustice facing millions of voiceless victims. Each year, hundreds of thousands of women and children are forced into sexual slavery and bondage.

Inspired by the strong belief that all women and children are created in God’s image and deserve dignity, freedom, and justice, five organizations banded together in 2003 to form FAAST—Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking. FAAST members include: The Salvation Army U.S. National Headquarters, The Salvation Army World Service Office, World Hope International, World Relief, and Project Rescue International. FAAST agencies are working to eliminate sexual exploitation and trafficking through prevention, prosecution, victim protection, and sustainable restoration.

Primary interventions include:

(1) **Prevention:** education for communities, faith-based groups, and vulnerable populations, advocacy, and demand reduction initiatives. In Cambodia, World Relief’s Trafficking-Free Village program educates communities on trafficking prevention. It focuses on enhancing the value of the child, informing community members about the tricks and strategies traffickers use to lure women and children, and training village chiefs on how they can use their leadership positions to prevent trafficking. Trafficking prevention is integrated in an approach that touches on issues of faith, the sanctity of human life, and the equality of all people, including women and children.

(2) **Prosecution:** legal advocacy and education, and training for law enforcement and the judiciary. In Sierra Leone, one element of FAAST’s anti-trafficking intervention (led by World Relief and World Hope International) is a legal affairs program that trains local law enforcement on how to identify trafficking of persons (TIP) cases, legal participation in parliamentary debates on TIP, court monitoring to ensure that the rights of trafficking victims are upheld and justice dispensed for the traffickers, and linking with NGOs to provide legal assistance for trafficked victims.

(3) **Victim Identification and Protection:** training for staff and affiliates worldwide, victim identification and protection, safe communication and networks for people at risk, and mental and physical health assessments and services. In the US, World Relief has expanded its anti-trafficking work through a subcontract with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. Field offices can provide comprehensive case management for longer time periods and help trafficking survivors move closer to self-sufficiency. Their most intense anti-trafficking activity works closely with local service providers and the Clearwater Area Human Trafficking Taskforce. The Tampa/Clearwater work includes case management for survivors, local training, and capacity-building through networking.

(4) **Sustainable Restoration:** educational and vocational training, holistic reintegration, and micro-enterprise development. One product is a curriculum, available in multiple languages including Russian and Mandarin, to support community action: *Hands that Heal: International Curriculum to Train Caregivers of Trafficking Survivors* aims to help communities prevent trafficking and respond to the social, spiritual, physical, psychological, and vocational needs of trafficking survivors.

Jane, a trafficking survivor from South Asia assisted by a FAAST agency after being trafficked to the U.S., says, “I would not have survived without their loving support.”
Religious communities have played essential roles for millennia in all societies. However, until recently, little attention was devoted within development institutions to the roles that religion played in the processes of social change and how the work of faith institutions and beliefs relate to development institutions.

Yet religious communities can, in important respects, be viewed as the earliest practitioners of what we now call “development”—the effort to create economic and social change in the poorest communities in the world and to address inequality and the plight of the poor. They also have an ancient and often vital humanitarian role serving, in many situations, as a main provider of a social safety net for vulnerable populations in times of crisis. Religious communities operate at both global and local levels. The spread of Islam is an early story of extraordinary “globalization” and centuries of missionary traditions have inspired individuals affiliated with faith organizations to travel to foreign lands. Many provided education and health care as well as religious messages. In many countries religious organizations remain some of the most trusted and respected groups providing aid. Many religious groups have existed in developing countries for many decades and enjoy an institutional longevity (sustainability) that secular groups can rarely boast. As the work of development has become more nuanced and complex, many religious groups have created faith-based organizations (FBOs), with degrees of separation from organized religion, that specialize in the work of international development.12

The ability to overlook the role of faith and faith institutions in development is growing more difficult as their contributions become more evident, and since 1950, the growth in numbers of religious adherents in developing countries has well outpaced the aggregate growth in population. Thus, the situation of neglect of the religious factor (broadly defined) in development is changing significantly. Over the past decade in particular, several leading development institutions have undertaken specific reflections about how their work and strategies link to faith institutions. The goal is, in the first instance, to enhance the quality of development work. Further objectives are to strengthen the partnerships that are essential, particularly in countries that serve as donors to development work, and explore how voices and alliances are understood to play expanding and significant roles.

The Berkley Center’s ongoing review of faith-inspired organizations, whose primary work involves development and social change, is available on the Berkley Center’s online database. While relatively few have an explicit focus on issues for women, Box 13 highlights some organizations which themselves highlight their focus on women and gender; Annex 3 provides additional details, for a wider range of organizations.

Issues arising at the intersections of religion and development (with an exploration of their gender dimensions) are highlighted in the two short case studies that follow. The first (Box 14) addresses global health policies, the second (Box 15) addresses issues for migrants.
Some Faith-Inspired Organizations Active in Gender-specific Development Work

**Baptist World Aid:** Part of the international Baptist World Alliance, it focuses on overseas relief and development, with programs in 30 countries on five continents and nearly US$10 million annually in donations. A special department targets each of the millennium development goals including goal number 3, which promotes gender equality and empowering women. Projects include a women’s hostel, microfinance, and programs focusing on widows and destitute women. They work through congregations, prayer groups, and conferences targeted at women promote empowerment. [www.bwanet.org](http://www.bwanet.org)

**The Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW):** An international, multi-faith network of women leaders who come together to stimulate peace building and reconciliation efforts in areas of conflict and post-conflict. They come from religious, government, and civic sectors and share two primary goals: to bring alternative resources, spiritual, economic, or educational; to aid in healing conflict; and to relieve the social and economic stresses that lead to violence. GPIW places special emphasis on cultivating interfaith understanding and developing leadership in young adults around the world. [http://www.gpiw.org/index.html](http://www.gpiw.org/index.html)

**The Mothers’ Union:** A Christian organization with more than 3.6 million members in 78 countries worldwide. The organization is committed to supporting marriage and family life. Development projects include life skills classes, literacy classes, and HIV/AIDS awareness. The organization works in partnership with many other organizations and is involved in campaigning and lobbying on a number of international issues including parental rights and child poverty. [http://www.themothersunion.org/](http://www.themothersunion.org/)

**Salvation Army:** The Salvation Army World Service Office, a subsidiary of the Salvation Army, uses local members to implement development projects around the world. In 2005, US$8 million was disbursed in 35 countries. The Army is committed to combating trafficking in persons for sexual slavery, and has a large women’s home league focusing on strengthening women and providing them with a network and support structure. [www.salvationarmy.org](http://www.salvationarmy.org)

**World Concern:** This nonprofit Christian humanitarian organization champions women’s empowerment as a crucial element of its development work. World Concern receives USAID funds as well as private donations and has an expense budget of nearly US$87 million. It operates in 32 countries aiming to help poor populations become self-sufficient. Its special “Women of Purpose” campaign links women’s groups in the U.S. to women’s groups overseas in order to provide funding and advice. World Concern is also involved in microcredit and providing economic opportunities to women. [www.worldconcern.org](http://www.worldconcern.org)

**WCRP (Women’s Mobilization Program Religions for Peace):** WCRP, major global interfaith organization, has a long-standing focus on women. Its primary work has been to engage women of faith as peace builders but its mandate and agenda have steadily expanded. In Central America, for example, collaborative action plans aim to address violence against women, rural poverty, and gender inequity in Guatemala. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, WCRP trains workers on how to heal children who survived genocide in Rwanda. [http://www.religionsforpeace.org/initiatives/women/index](http://www.religionsforpeace.org/initiatives/women/index)

**World Vision:** A Christian humanitarian organization that targets children and their communities worldwide. Through their widely-recognized programs of child-sponsorship they have been able to reach thousands of people worldwide. World Vision works in over 100 countries with an annual operating budget of US$860 million. Many of its sponsorship gifts are targeted at girls and women in order to provide women with alternative livelihoods and family support. Aside from tangible goods such as livestock, the sponsorship program also includes reuniting women with their children, rescuing victims of sexual slavery, and job training. [www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org)
Opportunity for Yet More Understanding in Global Health

Joy Phumaphi, Vice President, Human Development, The World Bank

For the many women living in poverty in developing countries, the absence of healthcare is a frequent reminder of the uncertainty and peril of daily life. Sudden illness becomes both a source and a catalyst of poverty. Every minute of every day, at least one woman in a developing country dies in childbirth, and preventable diseases like malaria kill 11 million children every year. These realities are experienced almost entirely by the poor. At the same time, the onset of illness can become the difference between investing in education or in costly medication; between investing in a path out of poverty versus struggling for subsistence.

As we make choices in the global health community to close the gaps in health services in rich and poor areas, we are seeing the vital roles that women play. In households, for instance, women have essential responsibilities in conditional cash transfer programs that support health and nutrition. In economies, women’s opportunities in the labor market are associated with reduced poverty and faster growth. It has also been shown that educated girls and women lead to healthier communities. Females who have access to primary and secondary education gain the necessary confidence, know-how, and self esteem which could consequently reduce child and maternal mortality, improve child nutrition and health, lower fertility rates, and protect them from HIV/AIDS, abuse, and exploitation. The many ties between women’s empowerment and global health are embodied in the covenant...
of the Millennium Development Goals, in our pledge
to reduce maternal and child mortality and to reverse
the spread of HIV/AIDS, often afflicting women in the
highest numbers. Because these daunting challenges
are so complex and so pressing, we must appreciate,
understand, and coordinate the health assets that pro-
vide services for the poor on the ground.

Beyond the public sector, we need to understand all
groups that provide good health outcomes and shore
up the areas where our knowledge could be stronger.
Among these are the varied roles of faith and faith-
based institutions.

Last year, the WHO released a startling report sug-
gesting that faith-based organizations operate 30–70
percent of health infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa.
In many countries these faith-based services are most
active where the public sector is absent, by reaching
the most marginal sectors of the poor. In several coun-
tries, we have experienced the ubiquitous roles of faith-
based organizations in health provision and the value
and necessity of practical coordination with the pub-
lic sector. Apart from the astonishing scope of faith-
based organizations in health systems, we know too
little about their health impacts and outcomes, par-
ticularly in how they affect women.

We also see that faith-inspired organizations contrib-
ute to health systems in ways that are often context-
tually interwoven with the social and cultural fabric
of their communities. Tangible factors like health provi-
sion, prevention, treatment, and care can be joined by
less tangible factors like moral and spiritual formation.
The relationships between these tangible and intan-
gible factors can foster the gray areas and complexi-
ties manifested in the global response and dialogue on
HIV/AIDS, and raise questions about proselytization
as well. The same relationships can also be a source
of strength.

By thinking analytically about the roles of faith-based
institutions in public health, there is opportunity here
for improved coordination. For women, when we look
to maternal health or to their vital roles in the health
outcomes of their children, the need to also think cre-
avtively could not be stronger.

Hope and Identity among Sri Lanka’s Migrant Maids

Sri Lanka’s migrant workforce has been a blessing
for the economy of the war-torn nation. In 2007 Sri
Lankan workers abroad sent home nearly US$2.3 bil-
lion in remittances. Remittances make up more than 8
percent of GDP and have surpassed Sri Lanka’s tradi-
tional tea industry. The government depends increas-
ingly on resources that come directly and indirectly
from migrants.

Sri Lanka’s Bureau of Foreign Employment estimates
that women represent roughly 60 percent of Sri
Lanka’s growing migrant work force. Little attention
has been paid to how religion affects their lives, but
growing evidence highlights its importance. Women
migrants find strength and community in a foreign land
through their religion which often shapes their cultural
identity. Religious affiliations are also a link to material
and spiritual support.

Most women Sri Lankan migrants work in the Middle
East as housemaids. Their problems are numerous
and many are linked their gender. In host countries
they face sexual and physical abuse as well as eco-
nomic exploitation (low wages) with no access to judi-
cial bodies. At home their children may be cared for
by relatives or underemployed fathers who often use
women’s wages on alcohol and gambling.

Even so, working as a migrant has strong appeal for
many women. This is hardly surprising as migrant
women can often earn over ten times as much as they
would in Sri Lanka. The women judge that working as
a migrant is their only means to provide their children
with a better life, and many use their wages to
pay for school fees and supplies. Some striking success stories serve as models, as a few women have come back with sufficient resources to buy homes and start businesses. Through migrant labor many women have become the primary wage earners for their families and have been able to lift dependents out of poverty.

Growing awareness of abuse of migrants, especially women, has led the Sri Lankan government to take steps to protect migrant women through its Bureau of Foreign employment. It seeks to protect women from unscrupulous agents who charge exorbitant “finders fees.” The Bureau promotes Sri Lankan migration and aims to ensure the welfare and protection of Sri Lankans abroad. However, the Sri Lankan government cannot regulate within the host countries and inhumane labor practices such as working for days without breaks, withholding of wages, and bodily harm are common. Women who run away from their employers must do so without passports or tickets; prostitution can be their only option.

The religious dimensions of migration are complex and only lightly researched. Women migrants from Sri Lanka take with them religious traditions from Sri Lanka’s four primary religious groups: Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim. Cultural, ethnic, and religious differences separate migrants from the people in their host countries. Women are often discriminated against for not conforming to the beliefs of the host country. Employers may also prevent women from practicing their religion by confiscating religious materials and forbidding women from visiting religious spaces. Women are also denied the ability to wear religious symbols or markers.

Sri Lanka’s challenges have echoes in other country situations. Studies on Filipina migrant workers underscore the racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination they face. Facing loneliness and homesickness, migrant women have created complex coping mechanisms. Communication with friends and family through the telephone or through a migrants’ network in the host country is essential for maintaining cultural ties. Filipinas often gather to share food, participate in rituals, worship together, and share their experiences. However, employers often seek to deny these practices. Beyond official channels and across borders, NGOs are playing key roles in providing support. Caritas Lebanon, supported by Catholic Charities USA, is an example, and runs a shelter for migrant women in Lebanon. A staff of Sri Lankan nuns helps over 5,000 women per year find solutions to their legal and domestic issues and raises awareness about rights. Through the shelter women can develop a network between other migrant women and share experiences and develop a community where they participate in religious and cultural traditions. Caritas works to form coalitions to stop the trafficking in persons and collaborates with the Lebanese government to ensure respect for migrant human rights.

A network of NGOs in Sri Lanka aids women about to leave for jobs abroad. Organizations like the Women and Media Collective in Colombo advocate for women while others such as the YWCA provide training. Unfortunately, women fleeing abuse abroad have few resources to fall back on and women who return many times are the victims of years of abuse, making assimilation back into Sri Lankan society very difficult.

Several international NGOs like Human Rights Watch seek to raise awareness about migrant women. Educating the international community and lobbying governments of host countries to protect migrant workers’ rights are part of its campaign. But providing a safe, humane workplace environment for Sri Lankan women while facilitating the migration process so essential to their path forward remains a major challenge.

http://hrw.org/reports/2007/srilanka1107/1.htm Human Rights Watch
Part IV:  
Women, Faith, and Development: Paths Forward?

Against this backdrop of richly varied research, policy debate, and action, the significance of the combined issues of women, religion, and development clearly emerges. Their breadth and complexity also emerge, both from the widely ranging cultural and social environments in which women, religion, and development intersect and from the wide range of topics and disciplines at issue. In many respects it is hardly surprising that religion has often been sidestepped in discussing gender and development; that women’s special roles have received little focus in the complex exploration of how religion and development intersect; and that the roles that faith and faith institutions play in the lives and livelihoods of women are seldom placed against the backdrop of social and economic development. The challenge, though, is to move forward to more conscious and purposeful exploration of the links. Insights to be gained from such exploration promise to improve the quality of development work and offer avenues to enhance the quality of the lives of women and girls.

Five sets of challenges emerge from this review, all of them involving some common themes: the significance of gaps in knowledge needed to forge action plans; the patchy picture of “mapping” ongoing work; the rich potential offered by new forms of partnerships; and unease around several topics which present ethical and cultural issues:

a.) A dearth of research about the experience of faith-inspired organizations on aspects of their activities that engage development issues;

b.) Growing appreciation of special disconnects of “voice,” and particularly the absence of views of women linked to faith organizations in development debates, especially those that involve women’s issues;

c.) A need for much sharper focus on development issues that affect women within faith organizations, including interfaith organizations, specific denominations, and individual congregations;

d.) Nascent potential for a far more purposeful and creative approach to building alliances and partnerships across different kinds of institutions and sectors; and

e.) An urgent need to employ the best techniques of dialogue and conflict resolution available to bridge some of the tensions that divide many within the development and faith communities who share common goals and often common values.

The sections that follow fall into two parts that highlight different dimensions of these broad challenges. First, a series of statements outline individual approaches by several women leaders and one (admittedly token) man. They present and intertwine the issues involved in quite different fashions, reflecting advocacy, analysis, caution, and boldness.

These individual presentations are followed in a second section by short summaries of a selection of issues that arise from the analysis, some already under hot debate, some barely recognized. The purpose of the presentation is to highlight the different types of challenges and questions that emerge from discussions on how religion, development, women’s agendas, and priorities intersect.

Calls to Action

The short statements that follow represent a diversity of voices and perspectives, each offering both a framing of challenges for women, religion, and development as well as explicit or implicit ideas on priorities and paths forward.
Jean Duff offers her vision of the Women, Faith, and Development Alliance which was formally launched during the April 2008 Breakthrough Summit at the Washington National Cathedral, in whose conception and organization she has played a pivotal role. Elizabeth King, a thoughtful researcher who has led the patient, persistent, and highly effective work documenting benefits of investing in women, especially through educating girls, illustrates how a systematic, evidence-based approach grounded in field research brings together different strands that can enrich development strategies and programs. Dena Merriam speaks from extensive experience with widely different faith traditions, and long-standing commitment to the issue of voice for women, addressing the importance of engaging women inspired by religious and spiritual forces far more directly in both peace and development work. Dalia Mogahed, who brings extensive experience in opinion surveying, offers important caveats warning against facile assumptions about women’s views, a forceful reminder of the importance of listening to women’s voices. Eva Halle’s is a passionate voice, drawing from her extensive direct engagement and personal support, drawing attention to the creative efforts of young people which span all sectors. She comments also on her appreciation for their own contemporary brand of spirituality. And Ray Martin, a dogged practitioner and organizer for public health in poor communities as an appropriate final word makes a vehement appeal to engage men in these critical issues.


Jean F. Duff, Deputy Director, Center for Global Justice and Reconciliation (CGJR), Washington National Cathedral

Experts testifying before the 2008 UN Commission on the Status of Women have made the case for increasing investments in women and girls as a key requirement for ending global poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Kemal Dervis, UN Development Program Administrator, highlighted that these “and other internationally agreed development goals can only be met when the untapped potential of women in eradicating extreme poverty is recognized and supported.” A growing body of research demonstrates how investments in women and girls—their health, education, employment, and rights—yield high returns not only for themselves, but also for their families and their communities. However, investments fall far short of what is required to achieve development goals. In spite of progress in achieving women’s rights everywhere, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights notes that “widespread discrimination persists in law and practice directly and indirectly all over the world.”

Women and girls around the world face great challenges. They bear an unjust burden, and this must change for the benefit of all humanity. We must act with common purpose and speak with one voice to change global policies and global wills so that gender justice and an end to poverty can be achieved.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The research, the development strategies, the financial resources, and the rights infrastructures for the empowerment of women and girls are substantially available. Progress is retarded by discriminatory attitudes towards women and by the related lack of political will.

A 21st Century approach is needed to change attitudes about the importance of empowering women as a key strategy for ending poverty, and to build the political will to deliver the necessary policy and legislation to ensure that women have priority in development. It can draw women’s organizations, faith communities, and the international development communities into a new alliance, the Women, Faith and Development Alliance (WFDA), to make common cause and common action for women’s empowerment.

Just as the faith community has so often perpetuated discrimination against women, so can it be a powerful force for changing traditional and culturally determined practices. Longstanding differences over reproductive rights have been allowed to keep faith, women and development communities from collaborating in those many areas of concern for the advancement of women and girls where they DO agree. The combined advocacy of these commu-
for the advancement of women and girls.

In a recent statement from the Holy See on the Empowerment of Women, Archbishop Migliore called for cross sector solutions (such as WFDA): “…Governments, civil society and faith based organizations would do well to work together to find creative ways of promoting full access of women to development programs and financing schemes. Innovations such as microfinance programs for women demonstrate that human ingenuity has the ability to create new and innovative solutions in this area.”

Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion: Multiple Sources of Disadvantage

Elizabeth King, the World Bank

The variation in gender roles across countries has much to do with the interactions of caste, social class, and ethnic and religious divisions in those countries. Countries that tend to share homogenous ethnic, religious, or kinship structures also often share a common set of gender relations. In contrast, when many groups coexist, even in small countries like Burkina Faso or Laos, multiple forms of gender relations are found across ethnic groups or geographic communities. Such differences in norms and beliefs could lead to deep gender divisions and historical inequalities in well-being across groups which are difficult to change at least in the short run. But when those inequalities reflect unfair policies that hold back some groups in favor of others or that have especially negative consequences for the women of some groups, the scope for policy reform is both clearer and greater. Understanding how much of the observed gender inequalities is attributable to failed policies and how much is due to differences in norms and beliefs is a first step towards designing such reform.

In Burkina Faso, social norms relating to land rights for wives differ substantially between the Mossi, the country’s largest ethnic group, and the Bwa who often live in close proximity. While women in both groups receive land rights predominantly through marriage, marriage institutions are more stable among the Mossi, their land tenure is more secure, and their agricultural productivity is higher. In contrast, the norms of women’s obligations to work on their husband’s farms are less stringent among the Bwa than the Mossi. In Laos, a country with some fifty distinct ethnic groups, the varied gender roles
of women of different ethnic groups seem to translate into significantly different schooling outcomes for them. The educational attainment of Lao-Tai women has far outpaced the progress of women in minority groups, even after controlling for socioeconomic factors such as income and geographical residence, while the education of non-Lao-Tai men has been rising closer to that of the Lao-Tai majority.

Like ethnicity, religion also influences gender relations and outcomes—but it is the practice of religion, rather than a set of religious beliefs itself, that seems to matter. For example, some studies find a negative relationship between the fraction of a country’s population that is Muslim and indices of gender inequality, especially in school enrollment rates. However, this observed relationship is weaker when socioeconomic background is taken into account. In addition, a study comparing the Muslim populations of several Asian countries found a large variation in the autonomy felt by Muslim women in different countries. Women seem to have less autonomy in South Asia than in Southeast Asia, regardless of the predominant religion. Within many Muslim countries, women’s freedom of movement is more constrained than that of non-Muslim women, but their autonomy in participating in decision making about economic matters is not static. They change for many reasons. Across the generations the concepts of gender equality and gender roles have evolved in response to environmental changes, economic crises and progress, and political and social innovations. Deliberate actions by states and civil society groups, through reforms in countries’ legal frameworks and economic institutions, have also played important roles for change in modern times. And individual preferences are themselves continually shaped by these shifts.

Some references:


**Women, Peace, and What the Future Offers**

Dena Merriam, Global Peace Initiative of Women

I and my organization now have well over a decade of experience in organizing dialogues with women in conflict areas. They have shown clearly that there can be no discussion of conflict transformation and healing without discussing development. They also underscore the many and powerful threads that tie women, religion, conflict, and social change. Women see clearly the interconnection between violence, poverty and gender issues.

We have also come to see that one sentiment prevails above all others, across cultures and religions, and that is the feeling women have that their voices are not heard. This situation continues, despite some progress and outstanding women who have earned their place in the centers of power, to feel excluded from policy making.

Women talk of this exclusion also in terms of positions taken by their religious institutions and even interfaith dialogue. Although women are increasingly being invited into the circle of experts to provide input, they often say that they are there as token representatives and for the appearance of gender equity, and not for serious participation in shaping of policies. This is particularly true of women religious leaders, who often do not get invited to the “important” meetings because they do not hold the big titles.

In the religious world, women leaders feel they are still assigned the traditional female roles of caretakers—i.e. looking after orphans and widows—but have little input into the policies that contribute to the plight of these groups.
Nowhere is this more apparent than in discussions on HIV/AIDS where women say they are most often the victims but are not part of institutional decision making regarding prevention. When these women become too vocal, they are often silenced by their religious institutions. This is the case with a number of senior Catholic nuns with whom we work.

Most women religious leaders, who care deeply about their faith and respect the core traditions, nonetheless have not been able to effect changes within their religious institutions regarding the status of women—and they feel this affects the issue of gender balance in all sectors and levels of society.

Religions deal at a fundamental level with an individual’s self worth, and if the religions do not recognize the value of women at the highest levels in their institutions, this attitude is communicated across other sectors of society.

**Development and Satisfaction with Life: Women’s Perspectives**

**Dalia Mogahed**

A core question that should underlie any discussion of how women’s roles affect and are affected by development is what they want and how they see their own well-being. Recent Gallup World Poll Well-Being data from 121 countries suggest some thought-provoking findings.

*Gallup found that of the top 10 countries in the world where being a woman most strongly predicted higher life satisfaction responses, 9 were majority Muslim.*

When ranking the correlations between Gender and Life Satisfaction, the region cluster where being female is most highly associated with greater Life Satisfaction turns out to be the Middle-East. These countries (alongside African countries) also happen to have some of the lower average levels of Life Satisfaction in the world, and this is even more true of the average Life Satisfaction levels of men in majority Muslim countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Correlation between Gender (male=1, female=0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>-0.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>-0.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>-0.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>-0.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>-0.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>-0.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>-0.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>-0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>-0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data raise complex questions. But it is not at all clear that a first suggested explanation would hold: that women simply have lower aspirations and thus a higher sense of relative success.

First, if this theory explained the ranking, Saudi Arabia should have been high on the list. Perhaps no women on earth are more sharply restricted. Instead, countries where women’s satisfaction ranks highest includes the most relatively liberal majority Muslim countries when it comes to women’s lives (with the exception perhaps of Afghanistan which probably makes the list because men are so miserable).

Our data on women’s own concepts of what rights they ‘deserve’ also shows that overwhelming majorities of women in these nations believe they deserve the right to ‘work outside the home at any job they are qualified’ and that they are just as likely to enjoy secondary education as men. I see a more complex combination of factors at work, including being protected from lower level jobs, women less prone than men to live in poverty for social and religious reasons, and that men’s lack of work in many places takes their absolute well being down disproportionately, thus creating a bigger delta.

a.) Lower level jobs: The 2005 UN Gender and Development report indicates that the ratio of women to men enrolled in secondary education is 95% in Iran, 93% in Egypt, 101% in Jordan, 106% in the UAE and 77% in Turkey (most likely lower due to the ban on headscarves in college). The same report indicates that women in these countries also make up a significant % of the professional and technical workers, where they are 30% of total in Egypt, 33% in Iran, 31% of Turkey and 25% of the UAE.

At the same time, our data shows that women’s employment overall is much lower than men. This suggests that the real gap in employment is not in professional or educated jobs, but in lower level ‘labor’ type jobs which make up a bulk of the work in many developing countries. Women are not doing the ‘rough’ work, while men have to, so this helps to explain some of the difference.

b.) % living in poverty: I looked at the lower 25% of self reported economic status, and in developed countries (Western Europe and the US) the majority of this group are women. According to census data they are made up of mostly unwed mothers—dramatically less common in majority Muslim countries. The majority of the bottom 25% in Muslim countries tends to be men, or that the % is about equal.

c.) Men without jobs; Unemployment is about 30% and this ignores underemployment. This may pull Muslim men’s absolute well being lower disproportionately because of the emphasis in culture and religion that men are the ‘providers.’

These results certainly should not be taken to mean that women in majority Muslim countries are in no need for development efforts. What they do indicate is the need to reexamine old assumptions about gender and development so that efforts are both effective and sustainable. It may be that in the Middle East, counter to conventional wisdom, the first target for development should be quality jobs for young people, men and women, as well as more broad based economic capacity building, rather than purely a focus on women.

The Power of Youth

Eva Haller, Chair, Free the Children and Women for Women International

What intrigues me above all is the inspiration of today’s youth. In my work in philanthropy, which spans many countries, institutions, and sectors, I see time and time again that most of the most interesting projects are those initiated by young people. They come up with ideas that no grown-up could possibly conceive. They have the hope and creativity and energy needed to think up ideas and to follow them through.

These young people are driven by a new and different kind of spirituality. The young people who today do not go to the malls or do drugs exhibit a true spirituality: it consists above all in their belief in their own power to change the world. With this belief and their conviction about what the world can be, they achieve miracles—raise funds, build schools, persuade administrators to change school curricula and so on. Free the Children is a prime example, but there are hundreds of others, people, ideas, and institutions. The young people inspire and create and
ripe for early action and leadership. A strong foundation of common agreement, on both ethical and practical dimensions, should allow for concerted action across different sectors. In this area of common ground, some topics lend themselves to action at community level, while others turn more on advocacy and alliance. Topics that might be viewed as falling under this heading include a focus on the girl child, and developing the potential for microcredit as a vehicle for expanding women’s opportunities and family welfare.

(a) Topics open for exploration but where clear paths have yet to be traced or where alliances are not fully mobilized. Topics in this category include the education of girls, action on domestic violence, and trafficking of women and children. An area of priority and growing concern is the situation of women in conflict situations—both their special vulnerabilities (rape as a weapon of war, displacement without support) and effective measures to support them.

b.) Largely uncharted territory to explore: housing, sanitation, and governance are examples.

c.) Another set of topics are the subject of significant debate or polarized views; here, efforts to find accommodation or to engage in thoughtful dialogue would seem appropriate.

d.) A final category entails high priority actions that lend themselves to bold leadership because they could prove transformational in terms of attitudes and commitment.

Men Against Gender Violence
Ray Martin, Executive Director, Christian Connections for International Health

The power of faith to change the behavior of men needs more attention. The faith community is slowly grasping the magnitude and destruction of domestic violence, so often perpetrated by men against the women in their lives. But so much of the work and advocacy of activists and the public health community is focused on women as victims. This side of the story needs attention, of course, but we must not slip into the hopelessness of assuming that male behavior is pre-determined, or immutable. Nothing in our theology or social science compels us to give up on men. Let us use the power of our faiths to call men to love, sensitivity, and caring.

Agendas Ahead, Calling for Reflection, Action, and Dialogue

The agenda for action ahead is broad and deep. Every development issue can be viewed through the lens of gender or faith or both, even as every practical challenge for faith communities also is wrapped together in today’s dynamic world with those of social change and equity. This report’s objective is not to catalogue issues, nor to advocate for specific action in any one area. What follows, instead, is a presentation of an illustrative selection of issues which reflects different types of challenges and thus lend themselves to different kinds of approaches and solutions.

Many of the issues that emerge from this review fall roughly into five broad categories. These are briefly outlined in the following sections:

a.) Areas of significant common ground which are

(b) Common Ground for Action and Advocacy

Common Ground: The Girl Child

Few topics are as compelling as advocating for improvements in the lives of female children. Young girls are, in many respects, the most vulnerable group within most societies. They face particular obstacles and a host of preconceptions and discriminatory practices, ranging from forced and early marriage, vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other infections, trafficking to far off places, special obstacles in securing an education, and exclusion from areas of opportunity.
Yet young women also represent hope and extraordinary dynamism. They represent ideals of many faiths and societies and when their energies and creativity are mobilized can transform organizations and areas of action.

For these reasons, campaigns and programs that focus on the “girl child” offer special potential to mobilize and unite. Exciting programs include those supported by UNICEF, Nike, Microsoft, national governments, and the UN Foundation. In building alliances among widely different organizations, particularly those inspired by religious values, action to support development of the potential of young girls offers a host of both ethical and practical avenues for advocacy and action.

Common Ground: Pushing Open Doors: Women and Microfinance

Microfinance programs have taken off in the past decade, propelled both by the success and renown of pioneers like Mohammad Yunus and by their intrinsic appeal, which is derived inter alia from the direct support it offers to very poor people and its self-help orientation.

A central facet of the microcredit story is its heavy focus on women and their remarkable success. This is based both on women’s sterling repayment records and evidence that their entrepreneurship benefits families and communities. The large numbers of women employed in the informal sector and their lack of recorded wage-employment has traditionally blocked their access to banks. When they relied on village moneylenders, interest rates were high. In short, microcredit meets a large gap and need.

A range of quite different faith-inspired organizations have become involved in microfinance as a means of helping the poorest populations in developing countries, many with the specific objective of supporting women. One example is World Concern, a Christian humanitarian organization; another is Five Talents.

Microfinance is popular today, with good reason, but by itself can rarely achieve lasting benefits on a significant scale. Further, institutional challenges to microfinance organizations are significant and there are far more suboptimal organizations at work than exemplars. Given this situation, prospects for enhanced cooperation among different kinds of organizations, public and private, faith and lay, to move forward in the microfinance field offers excellent promise.

(b) Mobilizing Alliances for Action, Educating Girls, Addressing Trafficking

An Alliance to Strike at a Fundamental Challenge: Educating Girls

Among the most remarkable lessons from development experience is that large benefits, to the individuals but still more to the society, result from the education of girls. Many call it the single best investment, anywhere. Yet large numbers of girls are not in school and the quality of education that many receive falls far short of what it should be.

Faith communities enter the picture in many ways. Many faith communities run schools and universities (including teacher training) or wield large influence over education programs. Faith leaders can potentially address cultural attitudes that have kept girls out of school. Faith leaders, as a moral force, can urge governments to give higher priority to action that furthers social justice.

Given the paramount importance for successful future societies and individuals, the need to move fast to improve education for girls, with concerted and multi-sector approaches, is warranted. Engaging faith communities more actively in this cause is a promising and action-able avenue. Potential action areas include supporting promising government strategies focusing on education, helping to address cultural attitudes that keep girls out of school, supporting improvements in education quality that improve performance and address family concerns, and “preaching the word” on the importance of this critical area of development.

Towards Advocacy—Domestic Violence

A shocking finding emerging from recent cross country studies is the extent and scale of domestic violence. Domestic violence affects women predominantly and also children, across all lines of race, ethnicity, income, location, and religion. Emotional and physical violence is used to establish power and dominance in intimate relationships. The problem is global but as an illustration, recent estimates indicate that in the United States roughly 5 million women are abused by their intimate partner each year.

Acting forcefully and in concert to address and stop domestic violence would seem a logical and moral avenue allowing religious communities to become actively
involved in addressing a leading issue for women. One place to start is with a thoughtful and forthright exploration of how religious teachings may have helped to perpetuate domestic violence, and which teachings underpin efforts to change norms.

Legal reform is called for in those countries where wife beating is legal or where legal repercussions for domestic abuse are limited. In other countries the critical action point is implementation of law and leadership to change attitudes.

Faith leaders should work together to affirm their responsibility to address issues of domestic violence and to denounce religious based justifications of domestic violence.

Jewish Women International offers a positive model with suggested goals of any awareness campaign:

- Acknowledgement that domestic violence occurs in religious communities
- Creation of an environment that supports victims
- Healing and justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators
- The message that abuse will not be tolerated by the community
- Changing the communal paradigms that allow abuse to occur

More Focus on Women and Faith: Conflict and Reconciliation

Women’s suffering in situations of conflict is receiving increased attention but still less than it deserves. Losing homes and livelihoods, breakup of families, losing family members, insecurity, and rape used as a weapon of war are just some of the consequences of conflicts.

Women are commonly absent from peace negotiations and in processes of planning and mobilizing for reconciliation, relief and rebuilding. So, often, are faith leaders and communities. These are two critical gaps and they deserve concerted action.

Discussion within the United Nations about the “right to protect” can be read to involve an obligation on the part of the international community to address effects of conflict, from international wars to the level of domestic violence. How this “right” is translated into practice has yet to be defined. Faith communities and women’s organizations could find common cause here.

(c) Exploring Potential New Paths for Common Action: Environment, Governance, Sanitation, Labor Practices and Migration

Linking the strands: Women, Faith and Environment

Concern about the environment is rising steeply and environmental action is increasingly central to development agendas. Many environmental issues affect women, from fuel wood conservation, cooking stove design, crop rotation, and water, to effects of climate change. Faith communities also are increasingly interested and active on environmental issues, their roles ranging from care of church run property to local and international advocacy for changing policies and practices.

The issue of the environment links together disciplines and sectors, and it has effects at all levels, from family and community to global. Engaging faith and development communities on environment issues offers a wide range of topics where practical action could weave together many strands in the women, faith and development nexus.

Exploring New Ground: Sanitation to Labor Practices

Every development and social issue has a gender dimension and likewise faith institutions are engaged on most if not all development topics. Not all topics, however, have received the kind of intensive focus of, for example, HIV/AIDS. Thus there are many issues that could be explored in terms of their faith, development and gender aspects. Two issues that deserve more focused attention because they affect women so negatively and on very significant scales are sanitation and labor.

Many millions of women, especially in the poorest communities, face discomfort, danger, and humiliation because decent sanitary facilities are wanting. These very real challenges have received relatively little attention yet are amenable to both practical and organizational solutions. Cultural dimensions are important, and the issue often highlights discrimination that women face which may escape surface attention.
Labor practices also have particularly negative effects on many women who are commonly relatively low paid and in the most vulnerable positions, often in informal sector jobs. Examples include exploitative practices surrounding household labor, both domestically and among migrant populations. Directing attention both to the practices and gaps in implementation of law and regulations could engage faith communities. The extraordinary transnational links of many faith organizations offers particular promise for expanding support to migrant populations.

Both sanitation and labor practices are examples of areas where most policy and program solutions are at a relatively early stage of elaboration. They thus suggest promising avenues for programs and alliances.

New Territory: Women, Religion and Governance

If microfinance is a topic where gender is widely discussed, governance stands in marked contrast. Gender is rarely on the agenda of research and action (though there is speculation and some corroborating evidence that women in leadership positions may have higher standards of integrity than the norms in a given society). Likewise, faith organizations have been less prominent in governance debates around development in recent years than the ethical content of the topic might suggest.

Links between governance issues and gender policies are significant. Among significant dimensions are legal frameworks affecting women’s rights, application of law (for example on trafficking), and efficiency of program implementation. Corruption affects many programs, and detracts from their effectiveness. Likewise, governance issues on many fronts link to the development work of faith institutions, which face challenges of implementation and transparency.

New territory worth exploring could be identified in intersections among these different dimensions of governance issues. Examples might be an interfaith focus on family law application or on implementation of HIV/AIDS programs involving faith communities addressed to adolescent girls.


Women’s Body Rights

No issue attracts more passion, anger, excitement, and confusion, in debates about social justice, than gender. These tensions arise because changes that come with true equality touch deeply how people live and relate to others and their core values. They affect faith communities across many dimensions. Harsh debates about reproductive rights, women’s freedom to work in many professions, rules applied to dress, and abortion have divided communities. Differing views about what is moral and just, what is most beneficial for those involved (mothers, unborn children), and what different approaches imply for values and the welfare of society have contributed to communication and operational gaps among organizations which see themselves on opposite sides of what some term “culture wars.” The consequences are serious, as the tensions shape perceptions and impede cooperation in addressing critical issues. This is apparent, for example, in some of the debates around HIV/AIDS, in differing views about working with sex workers, teaching young people about protection against HIV/AIDS, and design of maternal and child health care programs.

Two possible approaches could temper these tensions. The first involves encouraging different groups, even when they hold sharply diverging views, to work together on topics where they can agree. They could make tangible progress on, say, sanitation programs, and learn more about their counterparts. The second is dialogue, carefully entered into and, where sensitivities run high, carefully planned and facilitated. A third option, avoidance or conflict, carries important risks though in practice it may in some situations allow at least a “live and let live” scenario.

In light of the paramount importance that advocates give to what they term “body right”—that is, the right of a woman to control her body—this report’s authors argue for the route of dialogue, on their understanding that the common concerns that women across divides share far outweigh their divisions, and that with dialogue at least respect for difference and better appreciation of the underlying values at issue could allow for civil discourse and cooperation across a wider field.
Dialogue on Issues involving Muslim Communities and Women

West-Islam dialogue is a high priority on today’s global agenda. Georgetown University and the Berkley Center are engaged in a multiyear program, with the World Economic Forum, to survey and analyze the wide array of dialogue efforts that aim to improve communications among different communities and sectors. One finding is that the tensions around issues of gender emerge frequently as an underlying concern, yet views on the topic tend to be highly polarized and effective dialogue efforts to address the differing perspectives are limited and also limited in their impact.

Given the significance both of women’s positions within Muslim societies and the special challenges they face (low school enrollment in some societies, obstacles to employment) and the tensions that arise around women’s rights, carefully planned and creatively executed dialogue around the topic of gender in Muslim societies deserves a high priority.

(e) Calls for Leadership: Women’s Voices, Pressing and Persisting for Priority

Pressing for Women’s Voices at the Table, Positions in Leadership

There is wide agreement among women, but also including many men, that more women are needed in leadership positions in a wide spectrum of institutions, religious and secular, public and private, government and non-government, and academic and operational. A more equitable balance is seen as a primary way to ensure that the voices of over 50 percent of the population are truly heard. Beyond simple arithmetic and politics, though, experience suggests that with a significant share of women in leadership agendas will far better reflect the priorities, concerns and perspectives of women.

This applies in all fields but particularly where poverty and social justice in poorer societies are concerned, because in these societies the tendencies to marginalize women have been particularly fierce.

A good place to start is with development organizations, both secular and faith-inspired. The present situation is that there are significant numbers of women on staffs, in many capacities including volunteers, but they represent minorities in leadership positions. Changing gender balance (as well as other measures of diversity) in institutions is easier said than done and quality and fairness must be guiding lights in leadership selection. Nonetheless, heightened sensitivity to the need to redress balance, purposeful monitoring of performance in doing so, and affirmation of the importance of achieving better results can advance progress.

Given the communications and practical disconnects that have left the field of women, faith, and development so sketchily developed, it seems obvious that special efforts to develop case studies of leadership and to celebrate achievements deserve a special place.

Challenges of Priority

On many topics that affect the welfare of women and girls, what needs to be done is well understood and there is wide agreement about it. The major bottlenecks turn on implementation. The “how” can be just as important as the “what” or even “how much.” But there is another pitfall that seems to plague many agreed actions that promise to benefit women: in practice they do not receive high priority. When policy discussions advance or when budget decisions are made, action focused on women often stays at the margin. Gender budgeting work in several countries addresses this issue by highlighting both allocations of funds and their utilization, and this avenue offers much promise. But the key, most observers agree, translates into political will and commitment.
Interactions between religion, the status of women, and fertility rates are the subject of intense academic, economic and political debate in South Asia. They are typically influenced by two observations: First, significant differences in rules and accepted marriage mark practices across religious groups in this region; Hindus and Muslims for example, differ in their views of the acceptability of polygyny, the prevalence of dowry, the preferences for marriage to a first- or second-cousin, and the opportunities for a woman to divorce and remarry. The differences in these systems of marriage and household structure have often led to contentious social, political and religious debates about morality, the role of women, and the role of the family in economic development in South Asia.

A second observation is that total fertility rates and sex-ratios of surviving children vary sharply between religious groups. In India, Muslim women on average have 35 percent higher fertility than Hindu women (ORC Macro International). Muslims display significantly lower infant mortality than Hindus and have a sex-ratio of surviving children that is close to unity. The observations of sex-ratios are significant since India is one of the few countries where the overall female-male sex ratio is below unity and as many as 35 million women are currently regarded as “missing” because of excess female mortality at all ages.

Three scholars, (Shareen Joshi of Georgetown University, Sriya Iyer from Cambridge University, and Toan Do, the World Bank) are using economic frameworks to advance our understanding of these issues, and the relationships between them. They use a theoretical model together with data from rural South Asia to show that differences in the practices of dowry and cousin-marriage, for example, may not be solely a consequence of religion, culture, or preferences of a community at all. Rather, both these practices may emerge in response to economic incentives and marriage market “failures” in rural areas. Families may need to pay dowries to make binding commitments to future transfers of wealth at the time of marriage. When families can not afford to pay significant dowries, marriage within the community, particularly marriage to a first- or second-cousin, may be a viable alternative.

Another focus is the rather paradoxical observation that even though fertility among Muslims is considerably higher than Hindus, infant mortality is considerably lower, and the sex-ratio of their surviving children is close to unity. Their current hypothesis for this paradox is that Hindus and Muslims face very different costs of having sons and daughters. Among Muslims, the absence of dowries, acceptability of widow remarriage and divorce, and provision of inheritance rights to women combine to lower the costs of having a daughter and also ensure that investments made in daughters are more “recoverable” than among Hindus. Since daughters may be more welcome in Muslim than in Hindu families, and may also receive better treatment, Muslims may have larger families with more daughters than their Hindu counterparts.

The research highlights why debates on differences of marriage practices and fertility patterns should pay careful attention to the economic costs and benefits that underlie family decision-making.
Partnership is widely propounded in development circles today, with good cause because many creative arrangements bring together partners who barely recognized each other’s work a decade ago. Most attention focuses on public private partnerships, mobilizing the entrepreneurial skills and resources of private business to bolster the authority and responsibility of government actors. Philanthropy is taking on important and often creative roles. Within this kaleidoscope of evolving partnership arrangements, there is a wider range of potential for bringing to bear creatively new alliances among women’s organizations, secular and religious.

The wide range of topics that emerge from this review, where the intersection of women, religion, and gender has special relevance, underscores the need for further analysis and exploration. This report only begins to touch upon issues relevant to this field. Development practitioners and faith leaders face the challenge of addressing the problems specific to women in a way that includes women as actors, as leaders, and as change makers within their communities. Opportunities for dialogue and collaboration are many and very diverse. Women, as members of faith communities and as agents of development have before them a complex but hopeful agenda that offers the promise of reflecting the full range of women’s experiences and an exciting array of opportunities to fulfill their God-given potential.
Annex 1:
Resources in Literature: Annotated Bibliography

This bibliography includes an indicative selection of books, articles, and websites that focus on significant dimensions of the topics covered in the report. It does not purport to be comprehensive.

Abdela, Leslie. “From Palm Tree to Parliament: Training Women for Political Leadership and Public Life.” *Gender and Development.* Vol 8. No 3. November 2000. This article defines women’s leadership, identifies why it is important, and outlines some tools for increasing the amount of women in public life with leadership capacity.


Bonney, Richard, and Ashraf Hussain. “Faith Communities and the Development Agenda.” University of Leicester Center for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism, January 2001. This study surveyed a number of faith communities in Britain to determine the level of awareness on development issues so that an assessment for future collaboration could be made.


Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn, and Andrea L. Weiss. *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary.* 2008. New York: URJ Press. This edition of the Torah focuses on the role of women within the text and the Jewish faith. Introductory essays explore the historical role of women in Israel and Judaism, as well as their contemporary role.

Gamburd, Michele. “Breadwinner No More” in *Global
Gross, Rita M. *Feminism and Religion*. 1996. Boston: Beacon Press. This book examines the ways in which feminism has transformed religious thought and vision. Covering several world religions, Gross demonstrates how feminist scholarship has increased our knowledge of women’s religious lives. The book challenges basic assumptions of religion and provides analysis on what a postpatriarchal religion might look like.

Gross, Rita M., and Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*. 2001. New York: Continuum Publishing. The two authors engage in an interreligious dialogue drawing upon their Christian and Buddhist backgrounds. The authors talk openly about the fulfilling as well as problematic aspects of their religions and the role of feminism in shaping the future of these faiths.


Hochschild, Arlie Russell, and Barbara Ehrenreich, eds. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the Global Economy*. 2004. Holt Paperbacks. The editors collect a series of articles on female migration, both legal and illegal, for a number of service-oriented jobs. The volume considers women one of the major exports of the developing world, and examines the emotional hardships and other negative consequences of these experiences.


Human Rights Watch. *Rape for Profit, the Trafficking of Nepali Girls and Women to India’s Brothels*. 1995. Human Rights Watch Asia. Documents the trafficking of Nepalis into India for the sex industry. Report uses case studies to draw attention to human rights abuses as well as the failure of the Nepali and Indian governments to appropriately respond to this issue.

Jacquette, Jane S. and Gale Summerfield, eds. *Women and Gender Equity in Development Theory and Practice: Institutions, Resources and Mobilization*. 2006. Durham and London: Duke University Press. A collection of essays that takes stock of the field of women and gender issues in development, predicated on the concern that the field is losing momentum. The main sections address institutional dimensions, control of resources and livelihoods, and women’s mobilization and power.

Kniss, Fred, and David Todd Campbell. “The Effect of Religious Orientation on International Relief and Development Organizations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol 36. No 1. (Mar. 1997) pp. 93–103. This study explores whether religious orientation makes a difference for the programs and policies of international development organizations. Data on 63 American faith-based organizations are analyzed to find that faith traditions make very little difference on actual program activities, but do vary in how an organization conveys its activities to constituents.

Levine, Ruth, Cynthia Lloyd, Margaret Greene, and Caren Grown. *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*. 2008. Washington DC: Center for Global Development. This report describes the urgent need to invest in the futures of adolescent girls in developing countries. Girls’ needs often remain at the margins of development policy and this report analyzes how effective policies could be enacted that would target girls in developing countries in order to provide them with an equal chance for rewarding lives and livelihoods.


Past studies have shown that females tend to be more religious than males. This paper attributes this difference to low risk preference in females, as religious behavior is seen as being risk-averse.

Moser, Caroline O.N. *Gender, Planning, and Development: Theory, Practice, and Training.* 1993. London and New York: Routledge. Describes Gender Planning, a new tradition aimed at integrating gender into development projects and into the planning process. Highlights the entry points for women’s organizations to negotiate for women on local and national levels.

Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. “Existential Security and the Gender Gap in Religious Values” 1/28/08 draft chapter for the SSRC Conference on “Religion and International Affairs,” New York, February 15–16 and the edited volume by Timothy Shah, Alfred Stephan, and Monica Toft. This study argues that differences in existential security can help explain the pervasive religiosity gap between men and women. Using data derived from the World Values study from 1981–2006 the study analyzes structural and attitudinal indicators. The authors find that the differences in religiosity between men and women are more nuanced than originally thought and differ among religions.

Ozorak, Elizabeth Weiss. “The Power, but Not the Glory: How Women Empower Themselves Through Religion” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* Vol 35. No 1. (Mar 1996) pp. 17–29. To better understand why women outscore men on most measures of religiousness 61 women between the ages of 18 and 71 were interviewed about their religious beliefs and practices and how these affected perception of the self. Most women perceived inequality within their religious tradition but coped with it through cognitive restructuring.


Thompson, Edward H., Jr. “Does Masculinity Thwart Being Religious? An Examination of Older Men’s Religiousness.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* Vol 41. No 3. (Sep. 2002) pp. 521–532. This study used a sample of older men from three Massachusetts counties to examine the role of men’s gender orientation and gender ideology on their religious orientation. Gender orientation was found to be a reliable predictor of religiousness in old men. The paper discusses the repercussions of this and how masculinity can at times be a barrier to men’s religious participation.


“Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women

Jewish Women International, Organization dedicated to championing the safety of women and girls, healing victims of abuse, and breaking the cycle of violence in Jewish relationships and homes.

An international multi-faith organization working to end sexual and domestic violence. It offers specially designed training and educational materials to religious institutions of all faiths respond to domestic violence. Trains religious leaders in comprehensive community response.

American Institute on Domestic Violence

A listserve for gender and microfinance resources

Center for American Women and Politics
Annex 2:
Development Institutions—Some Websites and Statements on Gender Approaches and Priorities

United Nations Agencies

United Nations Development Programme UNDP
Main website: http://www.undp.org/
UNDP and the MDGs: http://www.undp.org/mdg/undps_role.shtml
HIV/AIDS and gender: http://www.undp.org/hiv/focus03.htm

The major rubric for supporting women’s development is a commitment to the Millennium Development Goals. UNDP’s role is limited to campaigning, consultation, and analysis. They have six areas of focus. 1) Democratic Governance’s impact on women is to increase their public participation, as well as improving their level of education. 2) Poverty Reduction aims to help women’s access to markets, lands and assets and the assessment of inheritance, marital laws and social norms. 3) Crisis Prevention and Recovery, on Women’s Day, submitted a letter to the Security Council on being aware of and preventing sexual violence in crisis situations. 4) Environment and Energy has published a number of papers and toolkits on the issue of involving women in the preservation of the environment and in the development of sustainable energy. 5) HIV/AIDS focuses on education and prevention among women, as well as fighting societal stigmas and working towards human rights legislation (against female genital mutilation, for example). 6) Women’s Empowerment focuses on gender mainstreaming, believing “gender discrimination is the source of endemic poverty, of inequitable and low economic growth, of high HIV prevalence, and of inadequate governance.”

United Nations Population Fund UNFPA
“UNFPA is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity.”
Main website: http://www.unfpa.org/
Culture, Gender, and Human Rights: http://www.unfpa.org/about/report/2006/culture.html

UNFPA is invested in campaigns, education, and consultation. On all levels, it is targeted towards the empowerment and health of women, including in the area of emergency aid, where it focuses in part on preventing sexual violence.

United Nations Children’s Fund UNICEF
Main website: http://www.unicef.org

Focus on five areas. 1) Child Survival and Development focuses on proper breastfeeding techniques, healthcare during pregnancy, and healthcare after birth. 2) Basic Education and Gender Equality aims to see to the provision of universal basic education, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, to improve the quality of basic education, to improve retention rates (particularly among girls), and to ensure education in times of crisis.
3) HIV/AIDS and Children aims to improve health-care and education among women and children, while also taking into account gender-sensitive issues surrounding the subject. 4) Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse looks to make sure gender-appropriate mechanisms are in place for children involved in national justice systems. 5) Policy Advocacy and Partnerships for Children’s Rights focuses on data collection that is disaggregated by gender (among other qualifiers), as well as conducting research and analysis on the role of children and women in society.

**Food and Agriculture Organization FAO**


The FAO looks to mainstream women in agricultural sectors of the economy. Education is central to their mandate in this area, as well as other tasks such as improving reproductive health and ensuring equitable distribution of labor.

**International Labour Organization ILO**


While the ILO’s goals are far-reaching and mostly include women and employment, in terms of gender and development their main concerns are:

- Equality of opportunity and treatment in employment
- Equal remuneration for work of equal value
- Equal access to safe and healthy working environments and to social security
- Equality in association and collective bargaining
- Equality in obtaining meaningful career development
- A balance between work and home life that is fair to both women and men
- Equal participation in decision-making at all levels

**Other International Agencies**

**European Union EU**


EC DG Development/External Cooperation Program/ EuropeAid’s gender issues website (the frame on the right-hand side has publications and projects information): [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/worldwide/gender/index_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/worldwide/gender/index_en.htm)


Women are particularly important not only to development activities, but to internal EU campaigns. In EuropeAid, the focus is on two types of projects: “at the global level, it will back the mainstreaming of gender issues into policy-making by supporting political, legislative and financial initiatives. This worldwide focus will be backed up by action undertaken at the national level which will improve the capacity of civil society, especially NGOs and women’s organizations, to advance the gender equality agenda in their country.”

**Inter-American Development Bank**

Under Social Exclusion and Poverty

[http://www.iadb.org/topics/subtopics.cfm?subtopicID=WOM&topicID=IS&language=English](http://www.iadb.org/topics/subtopics.cfm?subtopicID=WOM&topicID=IS&language=English)

**World Bank**

Main gender website:


“Gender Equality as Smart Economics.” Gender work is part of the macroeconomic and poverty network.
**Bilateral Development Agencies**

**Millennium Challenge Corporation MCC**
Main website: http://www.mca.gov/

The MCC has two types of funding: compacts, which are multi-year contracts signed with a specific country; and threshold agreements, which are contracts signed with countries that have not yet advanced enough in their goals to sign compacts. Compacts are specifically supposed to be “developed in consultation with a country’s citizens—including women, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.” Of the compact countries, Lesotho’s compact includes the goal of increasing the participation of women in the economy, Mongolia will be improving its medical equipment for earlier detection of cervical and breast cancers, and Morocco will be implementing an arts and vocational program targeted at women. MCC’s focus on women is in the planning and preparatory stages, more than necessarily within the goals themselves.

**U.S. Agency for International Development USAID**
Main website: http://www.usaid.gov/

Women in Development website: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/


Focuses on the empowerment of women, aid to women with disabilities, and putting an end to gender violence. Principle achievements: 67% of basic education programs focus on girls; 60% of microfinance clients that use USAID-supported institutions are women; almost one-third of those using USAID-supported enterprise development services are women; $27 million when to anti-trafficking efforts in 30 countries in 2006; supported legislation against domestic violence in Albania, against sexual harassment in Benin, draft legislation against the traffic in persons in Mozambique, and draft amendments to the family code in Madagascar. USAID focuses on education, technology, and legal reform as the path to improve the condition of women.

**Department for International Development DFID**
Main website: http://www.dfid.gov.uk/

DFID is the part of the UK Government that manages Britain’s aid to poor countries and works to get rid of extreme poverty. Development Gateway Foundation’s searchable development database: http://aida.developmentgateway.org/AidaSearchPromptSource.do?sources=true&sourceSelected=20

DFID and the Gender MDG: http://www.dfid.gov.uk/mdg/gender.asp


DFID is committed to the MDG, particularly to gender equality. Much of their work is focused on Africa and South Asia.
Norwegian Agency for Development
NORAD
http://www.norad.no/default.asp?V_ITEM_ID=1651

NORAD is a directorate under the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It aims to aid in the global fight against poverty. Women and Gender Equality is one of its thematic areas. NORAD works on women’s issues within the program areas of Health and Education, Democracy and Human Rights, and the Informal Sector and Agriculture. It also works with men to change attitudes against gender equality.

Agence Française de Développement
Main website:


“Activities related to ‘gender and development’ are divided up between institutional monitoring, participation in national and international reflection (OECD/DAC Gendernet network, French Gender and Development Platform…) and operational activities. On an operational level, apart from integrating gender in project and program processing and implementation (infrastructure, urban development, trade capacity building, rural development, water and sanitation…), AFD undertakes methodological research which aims to make practical recommendations and tools available, both in-house and to donors, in order to ensure a better integration of this problematic into activities.”
Annex 3:
Faith-Inspired Organizations and Gender Focus

This annex lists a selection of faith-inspired organizations and highlights their specific focus on women through their mission statement or program areas. This list is limited to those organizations that have programs that target women and does not include organizations with a broader focus. The results emerge as quite patchy, indicating that the effective gender strategies of many faith-inspired organizations are in practice embedded in their general strategy. This annex is far from a comprehensive list but aims to highlight the type of approaches and projects faith-inspired organizations are undertaking in order to target women at home and abroad. This material forms part of the Berkley Center databases; resources on the Berkley Center website that allow students, scholars, and interested citizens to compare and contrast key events, organizations, and statements across religious traditions, topic areas, and geographic regions.

The Aga Khan Foundation: Established in 1981, the Aga Khan Foundation is part of the Aga Khan Development Network and focuses on development, as a non denominational but faith-linked organization. The organization was founded by Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, the current spiritual leader of Shia Ismaili Muslims. AKF supports social development projects in the poorest parts of Africa and Asia, focusing on health, education, culture, rural development, institution building and the promotion of economic development. The foundation gives special focus to the challenges that women face in developing countries and is committed to facilitating the role of women in the development process. It also engages with men in order to create attitudinal and structural changes in women's lives. The foundation has an operating budget of approximately US$176 million annually. [http://www.akdn.org/index.html](http://www.akdn.org/index.html)

American Friends Service Committee: The ASFC is a Quaker organization that carries out service, development, social justice, and peace programs around the world. The work of the ASFC is seen as a practical expression of the Quaker faith. ASFC uses a lobbying and community-based approach to address immigrant issues, conflicts in Israel, Palestine, and Iraq, debt in Africa, youth and militarism and LGBT issues. There is a special focus on ending gender-based violence and discrimination against the LGBT community. [www.asfc.org](http://www.asfc.org)

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee: The JDC serves as the arm of the American Jewish community in the world. Its mission is to serve the needs of Jews around the world, particularly where their lives as Jews are threatened or made more difficult. The organization has a special focus on women, particularly Jewish women, in India and Eastern Europe. JDC also provides assistance to Ethiopian Jewish women in the US and promotes the empowerment of women worldwide. [www.jdc.org](http://www.jdc.org)

American Jewish World Service: Founded on the Jewish imperative to pursue justice, AJWS is dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger, and disease among the peoples of the world. The organization achieves this by sending Jewish professionals and volunteers to the developing world where they partner with local NGOs on projects. Ending gender-based violence is one of the organization’s goals, and many projects with individual NGOs have dealt with women’s empowerment. [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)

BAPS Care International: Non-profit Hindu organization working on several program areas in India including health and education. Seeks to empower and educate underprivileged girls and young women in local communities. Programs include an anti-dowry campaign, medical camps and seminars, leadership and personality development training camps, volunteer training, vocational guidance, self-employment programs, girls’ summer camps, marriage counseling, child-rearing seminars, awareness exhibitions, and distributes publications. [http://www.bapscharities.org](http://www.bapscharities.org)

Baptist World Aid: Part of the international Baptist World Alliance, it provides overseas relief and supports development. The organization channels funds towards projects targeted at local needs, with programs in 30 countries on five continents. A special department targets each of the millennium development goals including goal number 3, promoting gender equality and empowering
women. Projects include a women’s hostel, microfinance, and programs focusing on widows and destitute women. In congregations, prayer groups and conferences targeted at women promote empowerment. www.bwanet.org

Caritas and Catholic Relief Service, Catholic Medical Mission Board: Caritas is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development, and social service organizations working internationally. These organizations provide development assistance in diverse project areas including education and health. Program areas seek to help the most vulnerable groups in society including women and children. Trafficking and other issues that specifically impact women are targeted. All of the organizations are founded on Catholic principles and emphasize capability building and a belief in human dignity and agency. www.caritas.org

The Global Peace Initiative of Women GPIW: An international, multi-faith network of women leaders who come together to stimulate peace building and reconciliation efforts in areas of conflict and post-conflict. They come from religious, government and civic sectors and share two primary goals: to bring alternative resources, spiritual, economic or educational, to aid in healing conflict; and to relieve the social and economic stresses that lead to violence. Programs include conferences and interfaith summits such as one in Jaipur, India in March 2008 on the ways in which women’s leadership can create change at various levels in society. http://www.gpiw.org/index.html

Hidaya Foundation: Non-profit Islamic organization focused on sustainable development through education and employment programs in South Asia, West Africa, and North America. Their three program areas are: education, social welfare, and health care. Some programs within these categories target women specifically. Gender-specific projects include aid to widows, financial aid to families wanting to get girls married, and a female education program. The organization believes women are the future mothers and building blocks for society and are therefore key to sustainable development. http://www.hidaya.org/home

Islamic Relief: Islamic Relief is a non-profit organization dedicated to poverty alleviation and operates in 37 countries worldwide. They operate a variety of projects including emergencies, orphans, water and sanitation, health, education, and income generation. Women are mentioned as a particularly vulnerable group within each program area needing a special focus in the implementation of each project. www.irw.org/

LIFE for Relief and Development: LIFE was founded by Iraqi-American professionals as a response to the humanitarian crisis emerging in Iraq after the Gulf War. The organization provides health, education, and humanitarian services to refugees and victims of natural disasters. Programs focus primarily on Palestine and Iraq. The organization sponsors empowerment projects for Iraqi women including workshops on political participation. http://www.lifeusa.org

Mennonite Central Committee: MCC is a Mennonite Christian aid organization that seeks to demonstrate God’s love by working with people suffering from conflict, oppression, poverty, and natural disasters. The organization undertakes development projects worldwide focusing on agricultural development, disaster relief, peace and justice, and job creation. The US branch provides resources to combat domestic violence. http://mcc.org

The Mothers’ Union: A Christian organization with more than 3.6 million members in 78 countries worldwide. The organization is committed to supporting marriage and family life. Development projects include life skills classes, literacy classes, and HIV/AIDS awareness. The organization works in partnership with many other organizations and is also involved in campaigning and lobbying on a number of international issues including parental rights and child poverty. http://www.themothersunion.org/

Religions for Peace: The Religions for Peace organization is a large coalition of representatives of the world’s religions dedicated to peace. It holds a large conference every five years that brings together faith leaders of diverse religions to address important issues such as ending poverty, stopping war, and protecting the environment. At the conference in 2006 the organization partnered with the UN to address poverty in accordance to the Millennium Development Goals. The organization also runs the Global Women of Faith Network, a networking and advocacy group that seeks to build cooperation and communication between women of different faith traditions. The network builds the capacity of women of faith
to become leaders in their communities and work on development issues such as peace-building and sustainable development. www.religionsforpeace.org

**Salvation Army:** The Salvation Army is a Christian organization with a Women’s Home League in every country focusing on strengthening women and providing them with a network of women’s ministries. The Salvation Army World Service Office uses local members to implement development projects around the world. The Army is committed to combating trafficking in persons for sexual slavery. www.salvationarmy.org

**World Concern:** World Concern is a nonprofit Christian humanitarian organization that champions women’s empowerment as a crucial element of its development work. It operates in 32 countries to help poor populations become self-sufficient. Its special “Women of Purpose” campaign links women’s groups in the U.S. to women’s groups overseas to provide funding and advice. World Concern is also involved in education, microcredit and providing economic opportunities to women, for example through promoting small enterprises, as a means to get women out of poverty and the sex trade. www.worldconcern.org

**Women’s Mobilization Program Religions for Peace WCRP:** WCRP, major global interfaith organization, has a long-standing focus on women. Its primary work was to engage women of faith as peace builders but its mandate and agenda have steadily expanded. Internationally the organization has programs in Central America including collaborative action plans aim to address violence against women, rural poverty, and gender inequity in Guatemala. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, WCRP trains workers on how to heal children who survived genocide in Rwanda. During the Women’s Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, August 2006, delegates elected the International Women’s Coordinating Committee to serve the thousands of women’s groups working in Religions for Peace. http://www.religionsforpeace.org/initiatives/women/index

**World Relief:** A partner organization to the national body of evangelicals, World Relief is committed to alleviating poverty and achieving broad development goals. There is a special focus on women and children as primary victims of poverty and programs on mother and child healthcare. World Relief also rescues victims of human trafficking in the U.S. and does microfinance programs in developing countries. World Relief operates in 18 countries with an annual budget of over US$51 million. www.wr.org

**World Vision:** World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization that targets children and their communities worldwide. Through their widely-recognized programs of child-sponsorship, they have been able to reach thousands of people worldwide. World Vision works in over 100 countries with an annual operating budget of US$860 million. Aside from tangible goods such as livestock, the sponsorship program also includes reuniting a woman with her child, rescuing victims of sexual slavery, and job training. www.worldvision.org
Endnotes

1. The ambiguity implied by the quotation marks arises from several wise commentators’ observation that faith is a common attribute of virtually all human beings and has particular resonance for those working for social change. It also reflects the sometimes forgotten fact that many people working in secular development institutions have important religious beliefs and affiliations so that a suggestion of any neat separation of “faith” and “development” communities and people is misleading.


3. The GDI measures achievement in the HDI capabilities, but notes inequality in achievement between women and men. The methodology used imposes a penalty for inequality, such that the GDI falls when the achievement levels of both women and men in a country go down or when the disparity between their achievements increases. The greater the gender disparity in basic capabilities, the lower a country’s GDI compared with its HDI. The GEM evaluates progress in advancing women’s standing in political and economic forums, with a focus on the extent to which women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision-making. UNDP emphasizes that GDI focuses on expansion of capabilities, while GEM is concerned with the use of those capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities of life.


16. www.wfd-alliance.org


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This paper is part of a series of reports that maps the activity of faith-based organizations around key development topics. These reports explore the role of religious groups in addressing global challenges as a way to bridge the coordination gap between secular and religious organizations in the common effort of international development work.

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