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Reviewing the working groups suggestions and the overall conference

During this conference, **three basic affirmations** have repeatedly been heard, all of them related to what matter when reflecting on religion and development:

1. **Faith matters.** “Faith” and “spirituality” express better than “religion” what here is referred to, namely the wide variety of human experiences and traditions that may play a pivotal role in processes of promoting human dignity and empower people for active citizenship. Development agents, including faith/church based agencies, should build up more competence in dealing with this issue, and incorporate such knowledge in their professionalism.
2. **Terminology matters.** Language is powerful, at least in two senses: it expresses the power of definition, of deciding what things are and are not about, what is possible and not possible; it empowers for transformation, for seeing opportunities and assets, and for moving out of established boxes. The WCC has pointed at the epistemological vantage of the margins, a relevant perspective to take into consideration when working with the topic religion and development. In other words, we should work on our language, especially our professional language, and critically consider its power structure.
3. **Relations matter.** Too often, the relation with donors seem to matter most when agencies set up their plans and execute their work. Has this created a relation of dependency that requires critical discernment? In today’s context, the relationship to partners requires more attention, especially when the partnership is grounded in shared identity and visions, and seeks mutual accompaniment as privileged work method. Partnership with people of other faith and also partnerships within civil society are important challenges within this context.

Observing where we have been moving over the last years, it seems clear that:

- The theme “religion and development” is now widely recognized as relevant, or even important among development practitioners / administrators. There are still differences from one country to another, but the vast literature that now is available and the frequency of conferences and other events where this topic is on the agenda clearly proves the legitimacy of the concern to “breaking the silence” in the relationship religion and development
- The need to overcome “illiteracy” among development workers / administrators. This is widely affirmed, but it still remains open how this will be dealt with, both by agencies and public donors.
- The role of religious leaders is recognized.
- There seems to be a broad consensus that instrumentalization is a challenge that requires critical attention.

So where to move now?

- It is now time to give more attention to experiences from the field, especially to best practices, for analysis and sharing.
- ACT Alliance can play an important role in promoting shared reflection, in facilitating exchange of best practices and in developing an adequate terminology.

- It will be of strategic importance to link this process to the World Council of Churches' proposal of embarking on a pilgrimage of justice and peace.
- Training programs, and especially leadership formation initiatives, are important arenas of promoting competence and insight in this matter.

A final concern:

By what authority are development agents, among them faith-based organizations and so-called special ministries within the ecumenical movement, acting in foreign countries? Is their authority based on financial power, on technocratic expertise, or on ideological arguments rooted in Western models of understanding development (or even the course of history)? In the past, such authority may have been convincing, but this is not the case anymore.

How do we see this from a theological and a diaconal perspective? Will a reflection on this question discourage us from engaging in efforts of promoting human dignity, justice and peace? Or do we see imperatives – intrinsically related to what we are as a worldwide communion of churches and partners in God's mission for the healing of the world – that empower us to renew our commitment, and perhaps also, our way of assuming tasks in this endeavor?