

Relevance and Effects of Action in the Faith and Justice Field

Seeking to identify, assess and document results and impacts of the work of Fastenopfer's partners

This document summarises the main findings of the study *Relevance and Effects of Action in the Faith and Justice Field*. The study was undertaken by Fastenopfer to examine some of the challenges involved in monitoring and assessing the results and impacts of interventions by partner organisations whose activities involve faith, religion and social change. The study had two main purposes:

- to obtain and systematise evidence about the positive effects of *Faith and Justice* initiatives and the distinct logics and sequential dynamics of these effects;
- to make suggestions for ways in which Fastenopfer and its partners could improve the planning, monitoring and evaluation processes in field of *Faith and Justice* initiatives.

The study is particularly relevant as pastoral work has been a central part of Fastenopfer's activities since its foundation. In its 2011-2016 strategy (*Supporting each other*), Fastenopfer identified *Faith and Justice* as one of its three core themes. As with its other two themes, *Food Sovereignty* and *Human Rights*, activities under the *Faith and Justice* theme must be guided by results and by the definition of objectives to be achieved and the respective indicators. This fits within a results-oriented management paradigm that is increasingly guiding international development cooperation. However, Fastenopfer's experience indicates that identifying and demonstrating the effects of work in areas related to religion, faith and spirituality is, for many reasons, a special challenge.

Methodology

The study involved various methodological procedures, notably: i) field research with Fastenopfer partners in two country programmes, Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), selected according to predefined criteria; ii) documentary analysis of material produced by or related to the Fastenopfer partners included in the *Faith and Justice* theme in four countries (South Africa, Philippines, Guatemala and Kenya); iii) analysis of questionnaires completed by organisations working in the *Faith and Justice* theme in the six countries studied; iv) interviews with current and previous desk officers of the two country programmes selected for the field research; v) consultation of Fastenopfer documents.

The study team was accompanied by the Fastenopfer desk officer for the *Faith and Justice* theme and assisted by a specialist in the subject who is a part of the Fastenopfer network. Both made important contributions to defining the investigation procedures and methods and to interpreting the study's results and conclusions.

Particularities of work in the Faith and Justice theme

As a first step, the study analysed the context for work in the *Faith and Justice* theme, concluding that significant transformations have occurred in recent decades in the religious field in the six countries considered. Although partner organisations are aware of these changes, analysis of some projects and country programmes generated doubts about the extent to which these questions and challenges are incorporated into programme planning.

Despite differences in approach, contexts, institutional formats, priorities, etc, the organisations working on the Faith and Justice theme share certain values and principles that guide their activities. Common to all of them, and coherent with Fastenopfer's principles, are at least three central and complementary concepts: i) a 'liberating' and 'committed' concept of religion – and more particularly of Christianity, which has as a counterpart traditionalist and fundamentalist approaches as well as those without social commitment; ii) a concept of integral development, including not only a material dimension but also spiritual and cultural ones; iii) a concept of society centred on the intersection of notions of community, autonomy and citizenship, on the one hand, and feelings of solidarity, cooperation and fraternity, on the other.

Before mapping the effects of Faith and Justice activities, the study team looked at the profiles of the organisations, which are significant in determining results and impacts. Positive qualities and principles included:

- an emphasis on the person, their spirituality and conscience as a starting point for the encouragement of social transformation;
- seeing faith as a transforming element that engenders optimism and motivates and produces social and political commitment;
- the sacred as a legitimating element of the values shared in organisational activities;
- religious commitment, present in the selection of human resources as a motivation for voluntary or low-paid work;
- access to remote villages and communities;
- use of international networks for political interventions and a prominent role of churches as a political force of considerable weight in various countries;
- grassroots religious groups tend to have a high level of solidarity among members and to be relatively stable.

Some negative aspects in the nature and activity profile of these organisations were found, and although these were not studied in detail, some are mentioned and should be more deeply analysed in specific evaluations.

Dimensions of change

The study identified an impressive profusion of intervention effects with distinct levels of coverage and depth and a fairly direct relation to the objectives of particular projects. To capture these effects in a systematic manner, four dimensions of change were distinguished. These should not be seen as compartmentalised sections, but as areas that overlap on micro and macro levels.

Personal dimension

Changes in this dimension are particularly valued by the beneficiaries interviewed. Participation in programme activities, for example, is often seen as a 'striking' moment in which identities are constructed or reinforced, and which leads people to look at and revise their participation in various dimensions of social life – a stimulus for the full exercise of the rights and duties of citizenship. The most important effects in this dimension included: i) widening of knowledge and capacities (eg, development of a more critical and integral vision of reality); ii) strengthening of personality and development of spirituality (eg, reinforcement of self-esteem and confidence in one's own capacities; overcoming feelings of guilt, stress and trauma); iii) positive changes in attitudes and behaviour (eg, social commitment, overcoming prejudice and reduction of racism, changes in citizen attitude and conduct); iv) greater equity in gender relations (eg, better understanding in the family and reduction of domestic violence, greater access for girls and women to education and paid work).

Well-being and improvements to living conditions of families and communities

Actions that directly affect the personal dimension also impact on the well-being of families. Moreover, several organisations concentrate at least some of their activities on promoting community development. The main effects identified in this dimension include improvements in: i) the material conditions of families and communities (increased food security; access to land, water, housing and credits; access to education and health services; access to employment and income; improvements in infrastructure and environmental conditions; access to recreational and social activities); ii) community life (social cohesion; reduction of social segregation and ethnic tensions; conflict resolution; community security).

Strengthening of civil society, faith communities and churches

This dimension, alongside the personal, is one of the highest priorities for the partner organisations. The identified effects include: i) organisation of local civil society (creation of grassroots groups; strengthening of groups and their leaders); ii) articulation and political mobilisation (organisation in movements; participation in campaigns; political initiatives; networking); iii) effects on churches (broader and more social vision of theology at university level; development of a gender theology; positive influence on official positions of the Catholic Church; iv) ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue (reactivation of the struggle against religious intolerance; holding of ecumenical encounters; reinforcing ecumenical positions in the episcopate).

Rights and public policies

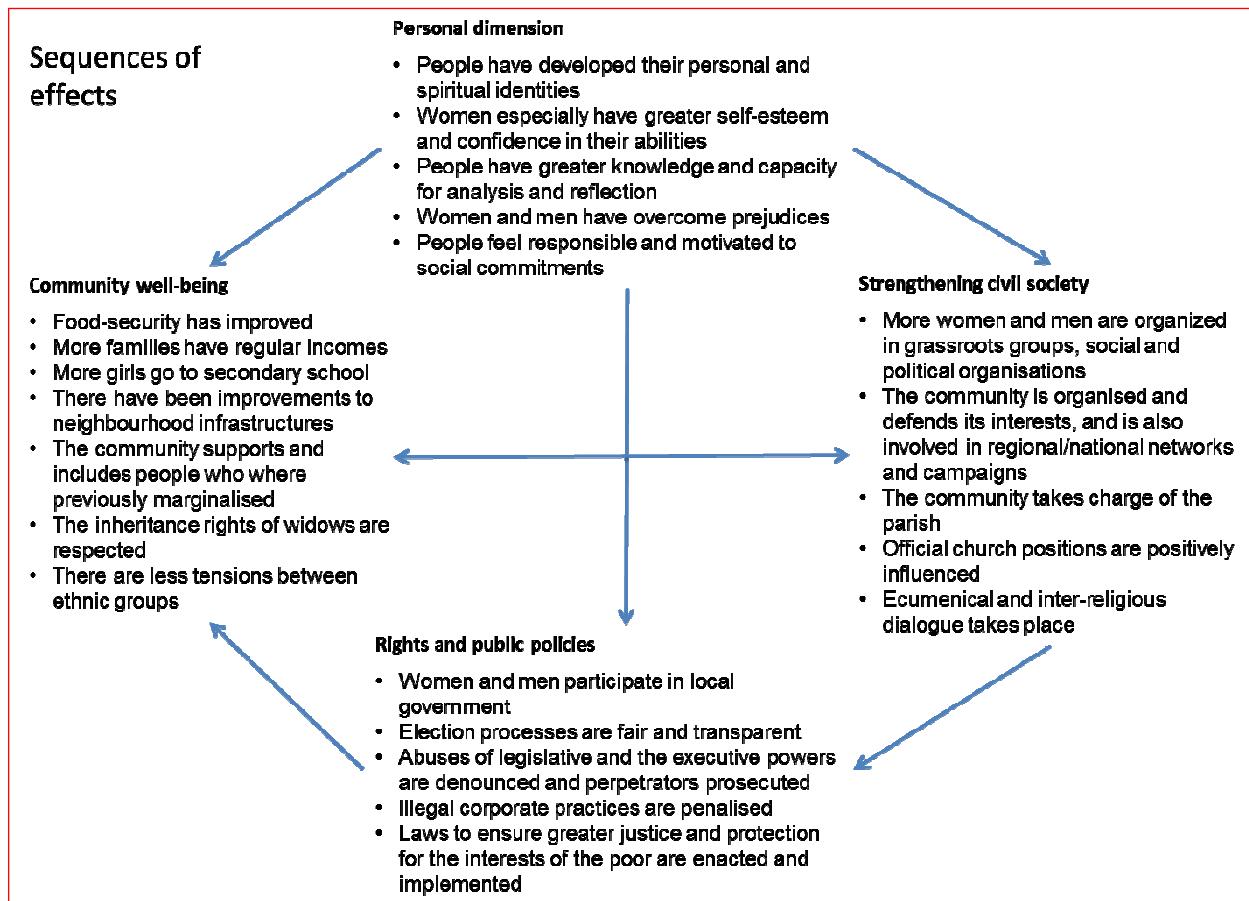
Effects in this dimension tend to be indirect and are difficult to evaluate because of the different contexts and other social and political factors. Therefore, we can only comment on significant contributions made by partner organisations in this sphere, such as activities concerned with: i) democratisation and transparency in election processes; ii) public policies and programmes; iii) creation and implementation of laws; iv) social control of local governance; v) social control of economic actors.

Based on this exercise, a matrix was prepared with the aim of assisting partner organisations to plan, monitor and evaluate the effects of their activities (cf. Study Report, Annex 5).

As can be seen, the dynamics between the four dimensions are not linear, as they are dependent on different factors, including the quality of the partners' activities as well as the particularities of the contexts. Examples include:

- the reinforcement of spirituality, the development of personality and increases in self-esteem – main areas of Faith and Justice activity – led people to social commitment, which appears as a necessary and logical consequence of faith;
- an individual's empowerment and improved self-esteem often leads them to greater participation in wider society (eg, in organisations or grassroots groups) or in the public sphere (eg, taking on a political role);
- well-being – a crucial dimension in terms of effects on the target groups of Fastenopfer's work – can be influenced by the other three dimensions;
- there are reciprocal dynamics between the reinforcement of civil society and improvement of living conditions at different levels;
- enhancing people's social involvement and better organisation of civil society at grassroots leads, through the constitution, strengthening of networks and articulation with national and regional movements and organisations, to fulfilment of rights and political change.

The diagram below illustrates the dynamics between the different dimensions outlined above, and includes some examples.



The study identified significant discrepancies between the breadth and diversity of results collected and those documented by the organisations in their reports. Despite Fastenopfer's investment in results-oriented management, reports and other documents produced by most partners are insufficient in the presentation of practical effects of their activities, seeming to give priority to simply listing activities. In their questionnaires partner organisations often overestimated their knowledge of results-oriented management, although that was modified in personal discussions with partners in the two countries during the field study.

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