Third Sector Research Centre

Conference Report

Faith in Social Action; Where Next?

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24th May 2016
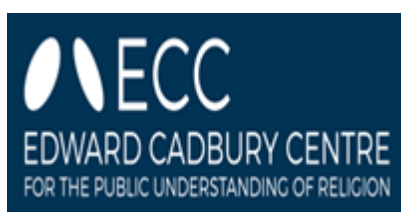
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Please note that workshop notes are verbatim and have not been edited.

Introduction

Steve Miller (Faith based Regeneration Network) introduced the purpose and structure of the event.

Steve noted that the purpose of the morning was to present the recent 'Faith in Social Action: exploring faith group's responses to local needs' research report produced by the Third Sector Research Centre in partnership with FbRN and the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion, University of Birmingham.

A short presentation of key findings would be followed by responses from activists with different faith perspectives and workshops on four of the report's themes:

- responding to welfare reform/austerity,
- issues of capacity in faith groups,
- the changing face of multi-faith working,
- conflicted faith - helping those in need and/or speaking out.

The morning would conclude with reflections from Professor Adam Dinham, Head of the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The main purpose of the day, however, was to look forward to the future of faith based social action. What should its focus be? How can faith based, and inter-faith, action be strengthened and supported and might there be key actions arising from debate over the day?

Faith in Social Action: Presentation Notes: Key Findings

Steve Miller (FbRN) and Heather Buckingham (Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion, University of Birmingham)

Steve and Heather summarised the key findings from the Faith in Social Action research project;

They noted that the finings reinforced what we knew already: faith based communities and social action:

- have an almost infinite diversity of social action in faith based communities
- build social capital and have resources
- cross social divides
- can deliver services 'on the ground'
- assert morals and values (with a solid basis for them)
- 'stick around'

But:

- partnerships are complicated, unresolved suspicions on all sides
- inter and multi faith work is great in theory but difficult in practice
- varied local challenges, takes time to build trust
- debate on faith has been 'hijacked' by political agendas

The context:

- increasing economic and social pressures
- rising need for services
- collapse of infrastructure support
- time required to build trust

Lessons from the research addressed three key themes:

- motivations
- proximity
- relationships with the state

Motivations

- Teaching, examples of key figures, personal experiences
- Concerns about misunderstandings - Islamophobia and evangelism
- Improvisation - people of faith willing to improvise, be flexible to meet needs
- Embeddedness leads to exposure to needs.
- Some faith groups meet the needs of their community, others serve everyone
- Faith groups stay around when secular project run out of funding and close
- Faith groups are witnesses to the effects of cuts, the way services are administered

- This often leads to filling in the gaps

Resilience and fragility

- Faith groups stay in the community, but capacity is a real issue, especially in relation to the vast need
- There is a (convenient?) political assumption that faith groups have massive untapped capacity to meet needs

Inter-faith work

- Leaving God 'at the door' does not make sense to many
- Best when done through personal relationships and shared agenda rather than organisational

To view the full presentation, click [here](#).

Multi-faith panel responses

Navleen Kaur – *is an experienced educator who is a lead facilitator with All Faiths And None, and Chaplain of the Khalsa Secondary Academy, a Sikh school which provides an environment for those of all faiths.*

Forty million people eat at the Golden Temple in India every year. Navleen describes the power of food in bringing people together and entails the narrative of two women who were not of the same faith or community and came to eat in a temple and in doing so demonstrates the potential of food in social action. Navleen described the power and attraction of a setting where people are cared for and loved. The phrase "come in for a cup of tea" evoked the idea that just by opening a door a bridge can be built. Navleen describes her work with young people who she connects with nursing homes and food banks and says to them, "let's work on this together".

 Catriona Robertson - *co-ordinated the faiths network of Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network; for many years she has convened the London Boroughs Faiths Network and more recently*

the London Peace Network which grew out of it; also currently the interim Director of the Christian Muslim Forum.

Catriona discussed three priorities: scale, responsibility and trust.

Scale: Many churches are involved in social action around food poverty, forming parent and toddler groups and a recent a surge of activity for supporting refugees as well as a number of Christian NGOs operating on a larger scale. Catriona speaks of how social networks can disrupt the individual consumer citizen choice agenda that has become more prevalent in recent years, "churches are social networks – we're not just talking about individuals here". Catriona reflects on the past when there was more localised research with a national focus and the impact this has on faith communities' ability to identify what is happening and ways to bring these activities together.

Responsibility: Catriona asks the question that the wider church has asked; when on the frontline of society, why does the church work to improve health, housing or education. This is followed by the questions, where does the responsibility lie and where do the solutions come from? Catriona calls for a rebalancing of power with local services where rather than tendering for contracts faith communities offer "some of the solutions you don't have".

Trust – Catriona asks "who do you trust?" Faith communities are often the first port of call –"we go to people who know us, who love us and who want to support us" and this for Catriona, is an explanatory factor in church's lasting place in our society.

Nic Schlagman – *has worked in the field of refugee rights and humanitarian action, currently community projects manager at West London Synagogue responsible for both social action and inter-faith activities.*

Nic describes some of the difficulties in balancing the diversity of a faith community and the power of having a unified voice. He describes how being part of a large community allows for effective project delivery due to the strong foundation of volunteers and generous donations as well as a challenge of balancing many opinions under one roof.

Nic envisages a community who wants to volunteer and donate but also wants to turn this into social justice. Nic describes the challenge of forming one voice that speaks to those who hold different political opinions and understandings of what might move society forward to the stage where "you have an entire community who can speak with one voice". He identifies this as a particular challenge for the Jewish community and speaks of the potential cost of an individual from the more progressive end of the Jewish community finding themselves sharing a platform to deliver specific projects collaboratively with people from other faith groups when you are from a "small minority in a country where the expectation is sometimes to stick together".

Nic speaks of the role of being valued in a person's life and speaks of the Jewish community valuing that "others want us here" and the acknowledgement of Jewish people's part in creating "rich tapestry of London".   Value can be built in layers – "Through partnerships, churches and other faith groups – we're valued – other people want us to be here, they want us to succeed". Nic speaks of the capacity of faith communities to offer vulnerable people an "access point to feel like they're part of the community, to feel like they're valued and that they carve out a role for them that isn't necessarily worship" and through this layered pathway can "give people real meaning and purpose"

Julie Siddiqi – *over twenty years background in grassroots organising; was Director of Islamic Society of Britain; and has co-ordinated the Big Iftar. Co-founded Nisa-Nashim the Jewish-Muslim womens' network.*

Julie begins with stating there is "no such thing as the Muslim community" and Muslims are ready for social action. This readiness is demonstrated in efforts to tackle food poverty and natural catastrophes such as recent flooding. Julie describes how an understanding is being galvanised that everyone can be a volunteer – this understanding is a work in progress with a great deal of potential. Julie speaks of the inspiring examples set by other faiths an example being Mitzvah – one day of action as she discusses the challenges for social action; "We struggle with infrastructure". Julie identifies women as a strong resource in social action who" haven't really been given especially women who haven't really been given easy things to get involved with". A strength can also be identified as a weakness – a mind-set has developed that "charity is just about giving money". Whilst according to the charity commission over £100m was raised during Ramadan this was for mostly overseas relief work and Julie called for "a push in the conversation" to "develop infrastructure here".

Julie discusses the role of friendship – "We've heard about it but I don't think it's been developed enough" as a resource that makes communities more prepared to face common challenges. When there are large incidents abroad Julie emphasised the need to have trust and that stems from being in each other's homes, being at each other's weddings – "having a genuine friendship". Julie calls for a shift from divided efforts in order to "not let territory get in the way of our peacekeeping"

Bharti Tailor – *many years as a leader of national Hindu organisations, currently a Member of the European Council of Religious Leaders and serving as Executive Director to the Hindu Forum of Europe and the Hindu Forum of Belgium.*

Bharti begins with describing how rare it is to find a temple that serves the local community in the UK–Hindu communities aren't geographical with exceptions of Harrow and Leicester. She also describes efforts to support those experiencing food poverty since the recession. Bharti describes how outreach is being developed in the Hindu community when following the tragic suicide of a student it was decided that the kitchen should be open and with the powerful sentiment of 'come and cook' this developed into a project feeding several hundred people a day and in time, partnerships evolved with other groups to deliver food to homeless.

Bharti describes another example in Hungary where ISKON, the Hare Krishna movement are the third largest religion who have been supporting refugees fleeing war on a daily basis. Refugees have been receiving meals at Budapest station and along the borders. There have also been individuals transporting refugees to various locations.

Bharti returns to local action where people are coming together for food banks, in collecting clothes and other efforts that address the basic unmet needs of vulnerable members of our society. Harti describes how "it's beginning to happen" and how inspiration is being drawn from other faith traditions. Bharti concludes with discussing the role of young people in faith communities, "Our young people aren't interested in just prayers they're - interested in religious organisations that do social action".

Workshop 1 – Inter-faith working

- Conflicting agendas with faith groups.
- Hidden agendas in motivation.
- Who takes the initiative in social action?
- Role of local authorities
- Who initiates multi faith work? Local authority? Faith community?
- The importance of leadership figure within and outside faith communities
- Community project manager funded and appointed by synagogue
- Barriers to the help which is needed: one group who cannot accept local authority funding – health and safety issues are an obstacle
- Church denominational boundaries breaking down.
- Local groups can grow organically – or even – online
- Facilitating multi faith working in a local area eg Nehemiah interns

Response to Panel

- Trust
- Mutually beneficial
- Responsibility
- Helps grassroots
- Create stability

- Importance of education to breaking down barriers
- Lack of diversity among those in power eg central government departments → how can you reflect diverse population with silo-ed departments
- Multi-faith work can be an antidote to the 'politics of fear'.

Covenant * Mutual benefit
↓
Trust, commitment, responsibility between many different organisations and 'communities', political and others

- Breaking down barriers through more integration at eg high profile interfaith events (Remembrance Day) or places (eg cathedrals).
- Database of faith based volunteering opportunities – could encourage them to come together?
- Organisations need to make it easy for people to get involved and volunteer.

- Importance of reflecting the different narratives of faiths, communities in the national story and all communities.
- Importance of using networks to share good practice – how buildings are open to all; Church especially needs to show how it is willing to utilise its space.
- Open religious buildings to all – how better to understand than to show young people all sorts of spiritual experiences as part of education?

Workshop 2: Capacity

- Co-production of public services – finding smarter solutions.
- When smart solutions are found, how are they resourced?
- Institutional racism – decision making board of health trusts are mainly white, male, middleclass
- Big issue – Collapse of public institutions
- Exercising the power that we do have
- How to train faith communities to respond appropriately when delivering services?
- Pincer strategy! Go straight to relationship with chief executives
- System is not going to change – we have to be more strategic
- Develop a person centred organisational strategic plan – that takes account of the bigger strategy
- Spirit in mind. Helping faith and spiritual organisations collaborate in Yorkshire to co-produce services
- Identify key players in strategic decision making and build relationships
- How can we (FBOs) work with secular groups without fear of misunderstanding?
- Strategic – using planning and measuring impact to have discussions about difficult topics?
- Use of social enterprises – to hand social aid on – need good models

- Open up potential by challenging assumptions. Dialogue open. "World Café" of faith work wonders. Brings understanding by listening.

- Reflection on research. Internal personal conflict reduces capacity because of fear or lack of understanding. Needs of community ←us→speaking out

- Measuring social impact. Can we demonstrate what difference we make? – social accounting – social value. A framework that works. A process that is reaffirming for your practice that develops capacity – governance – impact – mission. www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk

- Value of relationships. Social capital types. Interfaith work enables SC generation across all types of SC.

- Untapped resource in communities.

- Capacity in UK, in Pakistan

- Networking – community development – community organisations. Development of empowerment networks. Grassroots. Not a great drain on financial resources. Local knowledge.

- Infrastructure of faith organisations is outstanding. Buildings. Volunteers. Services. Social capital. Community connections. Compassion. "Anchor organisations".

- Some faith groups struggle to recognise the call/need for social action. Need to raise awareness.

- Ways we are going things no longer work – the 'mood music' has changed and the money that follows it. Role of partnerships and need to build these at common level

- There is often a willingness of people to get 'stuck in' and respond to need eg refugees. Social action can deepen role in faith.

- Our humanitarian response – should/can help us to work together and interfaith

- Encouraging the capacity (of members of faith groups) to critically reflect on how society is socially constructed" eg increased consciousness of gender issues, caste system, inequalities, peace concerns.

- Challenge re rurality. Higher cost of delivery and lower capacity and sparsity. Getting forgotten in city base focus.

- How can we tell our stories? This will affect policy…

- Maximising capacity: promote partnership working especially with local authorities, other relevant agencies. Volunteers – support. Networks – building them and building on them. Infrastructure support immensely helpful (where it exists) (eg CARITAS)

- Some faith groups struggle to access funding that remains (need to build networks and speak with one voice and learn together)

- How does the social action we are doing relate to our faith? Need help to recognise and develop this

- There is a challenge for faith sector to work with voluntary sector (nb VS reduced capacity too)

- Matching need and resources – easy to follow money rather than need

- Need new ways of connecting at grass roots levels – old hierarchical orders no longer working. Hub based networks?

Workshop 3 - Responding to Welfare Reform

- Why interested?
- Professional work – regular encounters
- Fits in with mission of organisation – Together Networks
- Impact of austerity
- Third sector work – reaction to communities
- Resourcing and linking organisations
- Learning from others
- Encourage and support those who want to engage
- Working on a project on faith and finance
- "no area that doesn't demand interfaith work"
- How to build our resources – complex needs
- An issue of equality and human rights
- Encourage individuals and organisations to collaborate and support
- How to bring faith and secular to social issues

Experiences – Resonating with report

What is happening in what area?		Managing learnings
Funding	"You live within that tension"	Tensions
Linking up		Issue of one voice
Grassroots	THE PRESENTATION	eg Diocese of 80,000
Light touch with solidarity		
Scales of resources	enthusiasm premises volunteers	Getting people mobilised
Equipped to support specific groups		Soft skills we already have
	"helping to guide them"	

What needs to be put in   How to help, assets they bring
   place to support older people?

- Collecting information – what is available "before charging in"
- Already suspects in the area
- Collaborating not duplicating
- Working smarter
- Real conversations – what does it look like?
- What is wrong vs what is strong
- Ruby's Kitchen – UN Article 25 – right to food
- Challenging Government sections
- Targeting specific figures
- Faith routes into secular power – I.D. Smith
- Scripture and legislation.

Strategies and Solutions

- Assessing assets
- Nervousness around skill sets
- How do you make welfare work locally?
- Facilitating – light touch framework – this is what it looks like
- How does that community work?
- tea or dinner "she was right to say what she said"
- Powerful positions – "not with the masses" "They forget about the people"
- Status of family, older people varies "care is always needed"
- How to manage variety of ideals of care?
- Involve with local authorities
- Building local authority networks
- Shifting responsibilities in faith communities eg interfaith work
- Managing discourses of terrorism – standing together

Key words/themes arising

- Expectations
- Encouragement
- Assets
- Partnership
- Conversation
- Challenge

Workshop 4 - Conflicted faith

- Bring together established and new social action initiatives

- Move to DO WITH not DO FOR
- Dialogue projects listening to people
- Go beyond agreement to revelling in the common ground
- Conflict – challenging the status quo. Innovation. Creativity.
- Young people of ten listened to in all faiths.
- Areas of agreement, meeting – music/art/food.
- Traditional medicine/herbs.
- Each of us can change the world
- A duty to help the poor
- Older generation dominates faith group and not listening and including younger generation
- Male dominated – women not included
- Being born into a faith not the same as practising
- More herbs – they can connect faith
- Getting to know local leaders and influence decision making with evidence of implications of closing facilities
- Stepping into the space the Council can't fill – controversial issues
- Speaking into a system whilst also having to work within it
- Added value – help organisations to migrate thoughts
- Going to local level rather than multinational
- Power – where do resources go – change grassroots and change system
- Need better contact between each other
- Open to our communities
- Speaking out makes us ask the hard questions about our activities
- 'Faith' can scare people way – demonstrating our integrity helps overcome
- Is perceived tension because some people funders find outcomes of 'practical' help easier to deal with? Conflicted faith
- Helping these in need and speaking out. Go together. Bring integrity.
- Barriers: some say let's not say anything
- Solution: choose words very very carefully because Govt./media might draw support
- Own community may come back at you! Being answerable to your community
- Media repeat items which can be negative
- In favour of positive disruption eg special media – open source, collaboration, crowd thinking
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Thank you.

I've been asked to provide a reflective keynote, which I'm taking to mean some reflection and some keynotes – the keynotes being to provide some food for thought for the discussions this afternoon.

I feel privileged to do this – and also responsible, because very much want to draw attention to the questions and issues arising from this morning, as they've struck me, and I hope they'll help you in your discussions this afternoon.

I think we find ourselves in a very odd situation in which things that always happened continue to happen – Catriona's reminder that faith communities were here long before government, and presumably will still be here long after they've gone - things that had been newly supported to happen stopped – and Steve and Heather's observation of the collapse of infrastructure is important here - but language continued as though nothing much had happened.

So the disappearance of infrastructure forms one part of my reflections.

The other part is about how faith based social actors have responded, and how they might respond.

So to start with the report, I welcome this very warmly, particularly because it is steeped in the political contexts right from the outset – neighbourhood renewal and regeneration first, along with Prevent, then the turn to welfare reform and austerity – also with Prevent!

These policy themes chime with me – I identified three drivers of public faith in 2009 – welfare, cohesion, and extremism, and I said then that there is a tension at their heart which makes of faith communities both heroes and villains. I was asked by a Labour Peer in questions once why that mattered. My reply was that these are often the same people receiving contrary messages, which seemed to surprise her.

I also welcome the focus in this report on community development – with an emphasis on giving voice to faith communities themselves. The report focuses on some important and familiar themes – capacity and instrumentalisation – as we've heard this morning. I also very much enjoyed Heather's suggestion that sometimes it's also about improvisation. And I think that's ok, so long as you're riffing on a theme you've already thought through well. It's also crucial to be sure you can tell the difference between improvisation and opportunism.

And thirdly I welcome the emphasis on a context which is religiously plural, though calling it multifaith, as the report does, has problems, I think.

So I'm going to pick up on each of these themes in the remainder of my reflections – reflecting on the role of community development, then multifaith, instrumentalisation, and finally extremism, though in a slightly nuanced way.

First, on the role of community development – the difficult political and fiscal context plays out of course in a difficult context for community development, which has often been observed to be one of the casualties of austerity at many points since the 1950s. Steve mentioned the closure of CDF, CDX, Community Matters and so on, and I think that changes the atmosphere, and atmosphere matters. It's hard when things feel like they're in decline or not valued. It also reduces capacity for the things I think

are crucial if government is to get out of faith communities what it seeks from them – that is resources and networks, and a sustaining environment in which they can thrive. And I've been hugely heartened to hear stories of incredible resilience, rooted in relationships, this morning. Julie and Nick both spoke about the importance of trust and friendship, and Catriona even mentioned love – not a concept much discussed in public policy circles.

I was remembering that I spoke at an event in Westminster in 2010, shortly after the election of the Con-Lib coalition, on the topic of Big Society and I said then that I thought this was a poor smokescreen for a fundamental realignment to do nothing less than end the welfare settlement, if not the welfare state. So I want to reflect on how community development is different to Big Society because it embraces the political - empowerment, social justice and participation, which got no mention in Big Society where it was just assumed that there would be volunteers and that volunteering would produce social justice. Actually, volunteers are not equally distributed, anymore than other forms of wealth. If anything, they are inversely present to financial wealth – the more poverty, the harder it is to volunteer, because poverty is time-consuming.

And I was struck by Heather's observation that their research participants thought the recession had sorted out those who are really committed. I've been surprised by how positive some of the response to austerity has been over the last few years, and I guess there is another side to this, which I want to encourage reflection on too: there must be lots of anger. So the question is where is that anger? Where has it gone? How's it being used? It's important that we don't end up whistling in the dark.

So community development is more important than ever because it is politically committed to social justice – and it's so good to see FbRN still flying the flag – and there are crucial questions about community development's continuing feasibility in contexts where funding has to be secured through other models – namely social enterprise and philanthropy. Thinking through how these models relate to – or undermine – each other seems pressing. And offer this out as a possible theme for discussions too.

Second, the role of multifaith. As Steve said, there has been the almost total disappearance of the multifaith infrastructure which sprang up under the New Labour governments. Face to Face was a high water mark and it was striking how quickly after 2010 the RDAs and therefore the regional Faith Forums closed. Likewise the FCCC and the FCCBF – the latter being replaced by Near Neighbours, a much smaller pot of funding, administered via the Church of England, which I observed at the time has the appearance of church and state attempting a revalorisation of the Church of England as the national church. I don't think this can be good for what we used to call multifaith relations, though I'm aware that is contested.

The report's emphasis on plurality is of course highly realistic, but I do have reservations about the term multifaith. I think it needs quite a lot of work in order to mean something substantially more than a handy metaphor, and I set out why in an article in Social Policy and Society in 2012.

I said there that are three problems. First, it is assumed to be good for cohesion. But actually there is no widespread, established method for achieving this. Or perhaps there is, in which case it would be good to bring that forward. The panels' stress this morning on friendship is obviously very powerful, and I'm struck by how invisible to policy makers those friendships are. Maybe there's already much more cohesion than people think? Perhaps there's a much as there's going to be?

As well as that, participants self-select and are the people who would already join the conversation, not the people who won't – who are really who you want to engage if your goal is cohesion.

Julie quoted the Archbishop of Canterbury's caution that we don't insist so hard on peace-building that we end up killing each other to achieve it. And that reminds me of Lord Bhikhu Parekh's caution that knowing each other better doesn't necessarily result in loving each other better. In fact it sometimes helps to kill each other better.

I also love Julie's suggestion that the Archbishop is everybody's Archbishop, and I've heard that suggestion made by the Church of England itself – that it holds the space open for everyone else. This is seductive but the question is how Christian-shaped that space feels to those every-bodies else. Is it a comfortable space and does it feel welcoming? I hope so.

The second issue is the assumption that services themselves should be multifaith. I understand the urge to inclusiveness but my research has found that sometimes single faith services are the only ones that some groups will access. So what to do – not meet need on the basis of the principle of openness to all? Does the principle trump the practice? Often under New Labour, it did.

It is also the case that it is extremely difficult to achieve multifaith services in much more than name because of the difficulties of agreeing different governance, quality systems , contracting and tendering mechanisms, let alone agreeing on the values and goals, which can often be the simpler bit.

So I suppose the question is, does this matter? Does multifaith have to be genuinely reflected in administrative arrangements and throughout a shared values base? I'm not sure, but I think you need an answer to this that is well thought through, especially if policy makers continue to think that everything must be for everyone.

The third issue is the role of instrumentalisation. On the one hand, a shrinking number of government contracts could be seen as diminishing this issue anyway. On the other, the remaining ones have all the more prominence, and the funders who fill the gaps – philanthropists and social entrepreneurs – can bring just as much, if not more skew.

Another issue is that the faith-based sector – if we're using that language – of course long predates government and other contracts, and presumably will long outlive them! So it strikes me as better placed than most, probably, to resist the instrumental imperative.

But I wonder if resistance is just one level. Challenge strikes me as another – what some in this area call prophecy. Catriona reminded us of Faith in the City, and I'd reflect that these are confusing times in relation to challenge. We've got massively growing need and a growth in the visibility of faith groups meeting those needs too – as exemplified by food banks, for example, and by the provision of food as hospitality too, which Bharti and Navleen spoke about as spaces of care and relationship, as well as the meeting of basic needs. But on the other hand, we have a shrinkage in the funding and infrastructure for it. How to alleviate need and challenge their causes? And Catriona spoke about the power of faith based networks to disrupt political narratives, alongside what she thinks is less of that narrative-forming and voicing going on – less meta-analysis and critique. And I agree that's been happening.

I suspect the reduction in government funding is two things at once – both a release from being instrumentalised by it. But there is no escaping the fact that it is also a loss, in terms of funding, voice and infrastructure.

This is really important because an important aspect I hear voiced a lot now is the view that the role of the Church of England is critical because of its national network of parishes – staff, building, networks and resources on every corner.

And I worry about this because my observation is of a lot of buildings and pension obligations, alongside diminishing numbers of clergy but also, as the research shows us, diminishing numbers in the pews too – mostly now old ladies who are dying and not being replaced. So where is this network and this army of volunteers? A more realistic assessment of the real religious landscape would result in better public policy in terms of faith based social action, I think and this has some way to go. And on that note, while I do observe a plurality of faith traditions here today, I'm wondering about the non-religious – humanism, or the Sunday Assembly, for example, where lots that we've been talking about also takes place – and also the informal forms of religion and belief the data are pointing so much towards. The question this raises is are they 'real' or 'proper' religion and belief? And if they are, what do they have to contribute and how can they join the conversation?

The fourth and final issue I think is a growth in the visibility of faith in the public sphere, which is accompanied by a growth in anxiety about it. Many people are I think hostile or indifferent to religion and belief in general and when they see it doing things in public, this translates in to suspicion – what are they doing? What are they after?

And this is coupled with anxiety and hostility towards people in need – constructed as benefits scroungers – and migrants – constructed as Muslims.

I remember what Hannah Arendt says on this theme. She writes "for the first time in history, all peoples on earth have a common present…every country has become the almost immediate neighbour of every other country, and every man feels the shock of events which take place at the other end of the globe". This "unity of the world" could result in "a tremendous increase in mutual hatred and a somewhat mutual irritability of everybody against everybody else".

The jury's out – just – I think. But the EU referendum, and Donald Trump's wall across Mexico could call it one way or the other. What strikes me as a time for bridge building is striking others as a moment for building walls instead. It seems to me that interfaith and multifaith social action have a role in articulating against this wall building. Just DOING the social action is incredibly important, but ARTICULATING it is key too I think, in times like these.

Heather spoke about the problem of leaving God at the door – something the report finds faith communities are uneasy about. This presents a huge challenge to the public sphere, which thinks of itself as secular – by which it usually means neutral – while in fact it is neither. I'd prefer a public sphere in which faith based social action describes itself and offers its services in its own terms and language – 'I do this for Jesus' – because that way it can be transparent and accountable.

And this brings us back I think to community development. The culture currently in general – outside of community development - is one of competition for scarce funds to meet increasing needs. Community development's insistence on collaboration could be construed as a call not just to act together, but to speak together. I'm not suggesting one critique or one voice. I celebrate the plurality of views in the conversation. But concerted spaces to think together differently – spaces like this – have more to offer than even they themselves might realise. Catriona spoke about partnerships of equals,

rather than faith communities providing to a contract, and she thinks – and I agree – that this has great potential for growing trust. I would observe that this will require a good deal more religious literacy on the part of those partners.

So I offer these as just my reflections, and I sincerely hope they will be helpful to you in your conversations this afternoon, and I wish you well

Afternoon Sessions

Introduction: Angus McCabe: Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham

Angus stated that his role was, deliberately, to be controversial – to 'set up' the afternoon discussions on the future of faith based social action.

Over the morning there had been a lot of discussion about the importance of friendships and relationships. This is hard to argue with – but is it not a bit 'motherhood and apple pie? Is there a danger that, by relying on relationships we only talk to people we like and people who are like us? Friendships can be exclusive - as well as inclusive and is there any evidence that faith based friendships are changing much – if anything – in the external world beyond faith communities?

Angus also noted that discussion over the morning workshops had talked about the importance of 'narratives' and stories', of encounters between people and faiths. But are narratives enough? After all, we have to interpret stories. One person's oppressed or marginalised group is the Daily Mail's 'chavs' and 'feral' community. Do we not need a more political (and politicised?) analysis of what is happening in, and to, society?

What the 'Faith in Social Action' report recorded was faith groups addressing very basic human needs: food, shelter, support. One participant described this as being 'a sticking plaster rather than a solution'. Sticking plasters may be important – especially if you are bleeding. But is not the challenge today to move faith based social action on from being that sticking plaster to become a part of the solution?

Afternoon Workshops: Key Thoughts

Each group addressed the following four questions:

• How do we build effective local, regional and national networks

• What are the key issues or areas of work for the faiths sector?

• What are our learning and development needs?

• How do we build strategic voice and influence?

Group 1

- We are playing to the Government's tune
- Asking faith groups to share resources with services they should be paying for
- Then privatise these services, essentially paying shareholders
- Who is hard to reach – the users or the service providers?
- How do we get involved? It seems like it's a free-for-all. The regional groups were good at this
- The bigger mosques and churches can rely on their congregations
- As faith group how are we different by following Govt funding? My faith pushes me, whether there is funding or not.
- Wanting to help, the spontaneity
- Balancing motivations between groups
- Make a success of things and you can get the funding on your own terms
- Action follows from your belief
- Social action is not a charitable act, it's social justice
- Sticking plasters v part of the solution – need better political analysis
- How do we build a strategic voice?
- How do we get that consensus?
- Do politicians view our evidence neutrally?
- In order to enact change, we need to be one voice, but we're all different voices
- The regional faith group boards provided a structure
- It's difficult to create a strategic voice when politicians are concerned with political ambitions
- Consensus is needed to avoid mixed messages
- Who are facilitating our conversations? Who is talking to the Government?
- There are alternative models of funding, don't have to rely on the Govt
- Community development that leads to community empowerment doesn't happen when we're all off doing our thing
- We're pre-Beveridge, it's a cycle (pre-welfare state)
- All sections of society need a strategic voice, faith sector hasn't got ourselves together
- Govt. sees us as a sector but we don't operate as a sector
- They see sectors in commercial terms.

Group 2

- Create safe space for dialogue – church, mosque, town hall scary.
- Training needs – space for faith communities to train and provide communities with their own support networks? Developing capacity to care.
- Development needs – how do we create safe spaces for dialogue within key local players to build relationships? Religious buildings/civic buildings = intimidating.
- Skills training
- Money out of institutions into the churches
- TASK responsibility
- Build local skills
- Creating safe spaces – health, physical, spiritual
- Training from/to hospital volunteers
- Enable communities to take care of themselves
- Communities to build and provide for themselves a substantial network; delve deeply into the resources own communities have
- Develop own capacity to care for each other
- Early intervention and prevention skills and training
- Local areas social welfare issues – CCGs, Foundation Trust
- Strategic voice of local faith groups
- Faith Action in health
- Divide and rule
- Public health
- Task shifting issue
- Political representation?
- Faith umbrella groups
- Research in social practice
- University set up/network
- Eurodiacania as a wider Christian Forum for discussion in Europe - http://www.eurodiaconia.org/
- Hindu Forum Europe – feeds into policy
- How do you reduce the power of state?
- How do you build the power of society?
- Tax money wasted on pointless projects – how do we challenge this?
- We pay taxes. Money is mis-directed into programmes that don't work. Within democracy, we have obligation to make sure money does to right place. What we do for our communities mustn't take Govt away from right thing.
- Christian social practice – Eurodiaconia with potential to influence Council of Europe – through research and feeding into policy.

Group 3

- Key issues – create safe places for anyone and all based on love, trust, compassion, relationships. "Community hubs" run for and by the community.

- We have to provide an alternative vision. Faith based charities under thumb of government decisions – early intervention not possible – then plug gap with faith orgs. How do we flip-reverse?
- CCGs have responsibilities to listen but we're not stepping up to mark of having a voice
- Influence needed is local; public bodies, local decision making bodies, public health, (Faith Action national government influencing body), CCWA Churches community work alliance, public meeting
- Difference between just talking and task shifting – need early intervention and prevention. How do we get resources out of huge orgs to local faith groups – training
- Strategic voice: national umbrella from every faith group that interacts with government, political and press and media representation, Eurodiacania – church representation in Europe.
- Find out what strategies of big ones are, eg diabetes? dementia?
- Who are we having dialogue with? Lots in system that can't have the dialogue because they're target-bound.
- Get people right at the top and bottom to talk.
- Every faith group needs interaction with government, state and federal umbrella – local. Europe/political representation NEWS media.
- We have to have something to say in order to have a strategic voice in order to have an influence.
- Democratic/rights. Financial accountability benefits civic society balance.
- Offering an alternative to "the solution" at any one time. There is Health Watch but not flourishing wellbeing.
- Social welfare, housing, health, influence, local clinical commission, foundation trusts eg Faith Action, CCG, CCWA, Public Body Literacy as to how to help.
- Building a strategic voice. Find the person (Directors of PH, Leader CEG) at the top and build dialogue with faith groups – gradual build-up, event, record/feedback, reflect, actions, co-production (cf. County Durham)
- Who are "we"? Are all the faith groups unified? Do they have the same needs?
-

Concluding Remarks

Angus McCabe (Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham) provided some concluding thoughts from the main discussion points over the day:

Demonstrating the impact of multi-faith dialogue is difficult. It takes time, trust and concrete outcomes can be hard to quantify. But in a post-secular and super-diverse society, such dialogue is ignored at our peril.

A question underlying much of the discussion throughout the day was how faith groups might move from providing immediate responses to austerity and community needs to having a stronger collective voice and influence the debate on, for example, poverty, extremism and community conflict.

A similar question was why many faith-based interventions and their rationale were based on stories and narratives rather than a more systematic/political analysis of particular issues – why was this the case and (as stories can have different interpretations) was this enough?

There was a willingness amongst different faith groups to respond to immediate social problems – the growth of foodbanks being one obvious example. But was there the capacity within these groups to continue to respond to ongoing austerity measures and their impact on communities?

Adam Dinham made a plea for more faith literacy. But is there also the need for faith groups to have a greater 'literacy' about secularism – in all its different forms?

But maybe, in the light of today's discussions on the nature and future of faith based social action the final words should belong to the Irish poet – W.B. Yeats – *'Only connect'.*

Iman D	Achara		
Yousaf	Aftab	Humanity First / Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association	www.muslimsforhumanity.org.uk www.humanityfirst.org
Charanjit	Ajitsingh	Hounslow Friends of Faith and World Congress of Faiths	www.hounslowfriendsoffaith.org www.worldfaiths.org
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Paul	Bickley	Theos	http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk
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Elizabeth	Bramley	Church Urban Fund	www.cuf.org.uk
Paul	Bridges	Huddersfield Mission	http://www.huddersfieldmission.org.uk
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Stefan	Brown		
Heather	Buckingham	The Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion	http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/research/cpur/index.aspx
Petra	Bulantova		
Andy	Burns	Capital Mass	www.capitalmass.org.uk
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Siriol	Davies	Diocese of Southwark	
John	Davis	Together Liverpool	http://www.cuf.org.uk/together-liverpool
Majid	Dawood		

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Nikki	Dravers		
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Michael	Gartland		
Jack	Gilbert	Rainbow Hamlets	http://www.rainbowhamlets.org/
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Kate	Guest	Historic England	www.historicengland.org.uk
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Josie	Hicklin	Tearfund and InnerChange	www.tearfund.org
Jon-Jon	Hilton		
Jane	Horgan	The Cambridge Inter-faith Programme	http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/
Mazher	Hussain		
Harris	Iqbal	Penny Appeal	http://Pennyappeal.org/

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Navleen	Kaur	Khalsa Academies Trust	www.khalsasecondaryacademy.com
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Peter	Long	traditional anglican communion	www.traditionalanglicancommunion-cornwall-uk.webs.com
Bryan	Lovell		
Rowena	Loverance	Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)	http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/our-structures/quaker-committee-for-christian-and-interfaith-relations
Tim	Lucas	Saltbox	http://www.saltbox.org.uk
David	Maggs		
Derek	Markie		
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David	Rayner		
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Jim	Robertson	North East Regional Faiths Network	www.nerfn.org.uk
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Carlo	Schröder	Faithful Neighbours and Near Neighbours	www.faithfulneighbours.org.uk / www.near-neighbours.org.uk
Shuja	Shafi	The Muslim Council of Britain	www.mcb.org.uk
Theophilia	Shaw	Anglican Diocese of Southwark	http://www.southwark.anglican.org
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Emel	Soylu	Slough Faith Partnership	http://www.sloughfaithpartnership.org.uk
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Marie	Trubic	United Reformed Church	

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Andy	Williams	Faith Network 4 Manchester	http://fn4m.org
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John	Woodhouse	Westminster Cathedral interfaith group	
Angela	Wright	Northern College	http://northern.ac.uk

Below the Radar

This research theme explores the role, function, impact and experiences of small community groups or activists. These include those working at a local level or in communities of interest - such as women's groups or refugee and migrant groups. We are interested in both formal organisations and more informal community activity. The research is informed by a reference group which brings together practitioners from national community networks, policy makers and researchers, as well as others who bring particular perspectives on, for example, rural, gender or black and minority ethnic issues.

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Hosted by: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Funded by: E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL   BARROW CADBURY