

**SARPN Consultative Meeting to enhance awareness on the work of
Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) in poverty reduction and
the MDGs in the SADC region**

30th November 2005

Activity Concept

Introduction

Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), international and national, have for many years played a key role in the delivery of development and humanitarian assistance, alongside their faith work. The work of FBOs has been in health services provision, HIV/AIDs, water and sanitation and education, among others. Because of their largely community based and spiritual nature FBOs reach, social networks, attain confidence and support at the community level. To a large extent their role has been well appreciated by governments, donors and the communities they serve. Some challenges have, however, been noted with respect to the operation of FBOs, these include scaling up of initiatives, capacity and measuring and assessing the impact of FBOs in relation to other 'mainstream' civil society entities.

Perhaps the most significant challenge however, has been the level of understanding and awareness on participation by FBOs in key processes, at policy and decision making levels. While varied, the reasons for this can most probably be summarized by the fact that FBOs have traditionally been perceived as not being 'mainstream' to development - both within FBO circles and outside. This often means that some of the work and input of FBOs is implemented in a manner that is divorced from other mainstream ongoing policy processes and discussions. The risk associated with this trend is the marginalization of FBOs and the negation, in the long term, of a key player in poverty reduction. Their contribution to the development sector is also marginalized and not adequately accounted for in the process. In addition, the opportunity to identify and build on synergies with other actors (through networking) is frequently lost.

Faith Based Organizations and the MDGs

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are "the world's time bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions." Equally so the contributors to the attainment of the MDGs and other poverty goals can be very diverse in their formation. The MDGs represent shared international poverty concerns. As such, they have come to represent a convergence point for the interventions of a wide range of actors. In fact, it has become increasingly apparent that their achievement is significantly dependant upon joint and complementary action of these diverse actors. In this respect, it is important that actors working towards development and poverty reduction in the region are cognizant of the MDGs and responsive to the MDG framework. It is only through collective efforts of actors in the region that the MDGS can be achieved.

In view of this, SARPN seeks to contribute to enhancing the awareness and engagement of FBOs in regional policy processes that seek to impact the poverty levels. Specifically, SARPN seeks to contribute towards better understanding of the current and potential role of FBOs in development and poverty reduction among 'mainstream' development actors. This is with the view to promoting greater deliberate participation in and contribution towards the achievement of the MDGs by these actors through their activities.

As a first step SARNP seeks to engage FBOs in a process which would explore the current work of FBOs, the operating context and challenges of FBOs. In addition the SARNP initiative will seek to identify ways in which these challenges can be addressed in the context of the SADC region. The specific objectives of the process proposed are outlined.

Objectives

The objectives of the roundtable will be to:

- Raise awareness and understanding on the role and contribution of FBOs towards poverty reduction and the MDGs.
- Share cross country experiences on the work of FBOs in poverty reduction and the MDGs.
- Identify opportunities to enhance the engagement of FBOs in poverty related platforms and collaboration with other stakeholders.
- Identify potential activities that could be undertaken to strengthen awareness on the FBO work.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the meeting:

- Areas where FBO are working will be understood
- Opportunities for strengthening FBO collaboration with other stakeholders would be identified
- Potential strategies for responding to the opportunities for collaboration will be identified.

APPENDIX 1: ABOUT SARPAN

Poverty is widely recognized as the greatest single challenge facing governments and civil society in the SADC region. The establishment of SARPAN in 2001 reflected this concern by governments and the international community, civil society and analysts across the region and the need to enhance concerted efforts needed if countries in the region are to meet the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

SARPAN's ultimate goal is the promotion of pro-poor policy, strategy and practice that support the impact on poverty and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in the SADC region. Its purpose is to deepen and widen the debates on policy, strategy and practice, and the decision-making processes. In order to achieve this goal, SARPAN's activities are centred on the following:

- Facilitating public debates on issues of central importance for poverty reduction;
- Linking up various sectors and stakeholders, particularly key decision makers and policy implementers, across the region;
- Providing analysis and better understanding of poverty through evidence driven approaches;
- Creating an enabling environment for engagement and participation in the debate on poverty issues; and
- Making accessible information and knowledge around the multiple dimensions of poverty across the region.

SARPAN also recognizes the significance of regional and continental entities. As such, whenever possible, SARPAN works in partnership with, or in support of the initiatives of SADC (e.g. the RISDP) and the African Union (NEPAD and the Pan African Parliament). Whenever possible, SARPAN also engages the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

SARPAN has three programme areas namely Economic Dimensions, Social Dimensions and Political Dimensions.

For more information about SARPAN visit www.sarpan.org.za