

KOGE HANDBOOK
**GUIDE FOR THE PRACTICE-
ORIENTED REFLECTION ON THE
ROLE OF RELIGIOUS AND
CULTURAL FACTORS IN
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

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Guide for the practice-oriented reflection on the role of religious and cultural factors in development cooperation projects

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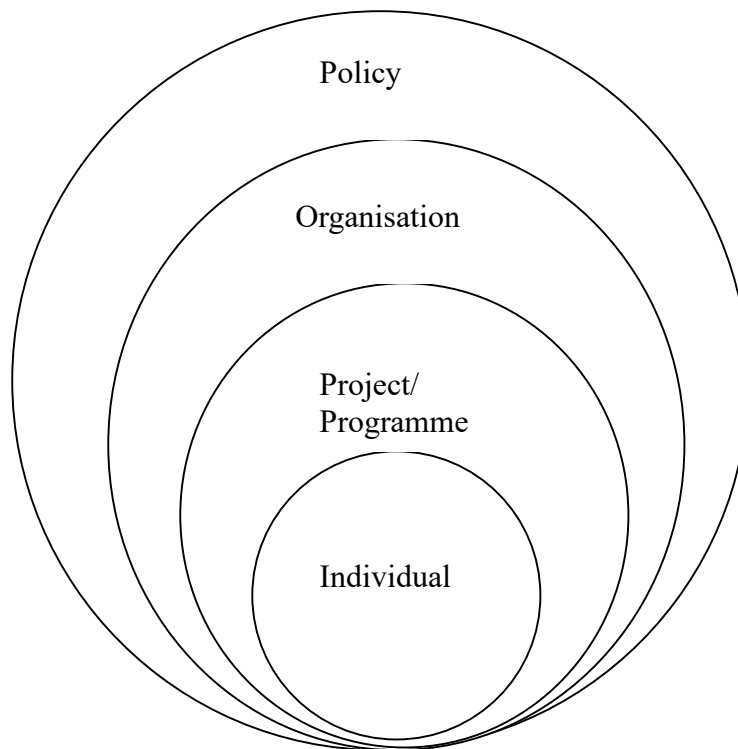
December 2014

Introduction

The impact of religious and cultural factors in development cooperation projects and programmes manifests itself on four interdependent levels¹:

1. At the individual level (personal attitudes and experiences, intercultural sensitivity, capacity for self-reflection, etc.)
2. At the project and programme level (partners, target groups, objectives, measures, etc.)
3. At the organisational level (processes, structures, human resources, communication, etc.)
4. At the policy level (understanding and goals of development, cultural / religious "climate" (such as September 11), tools used).

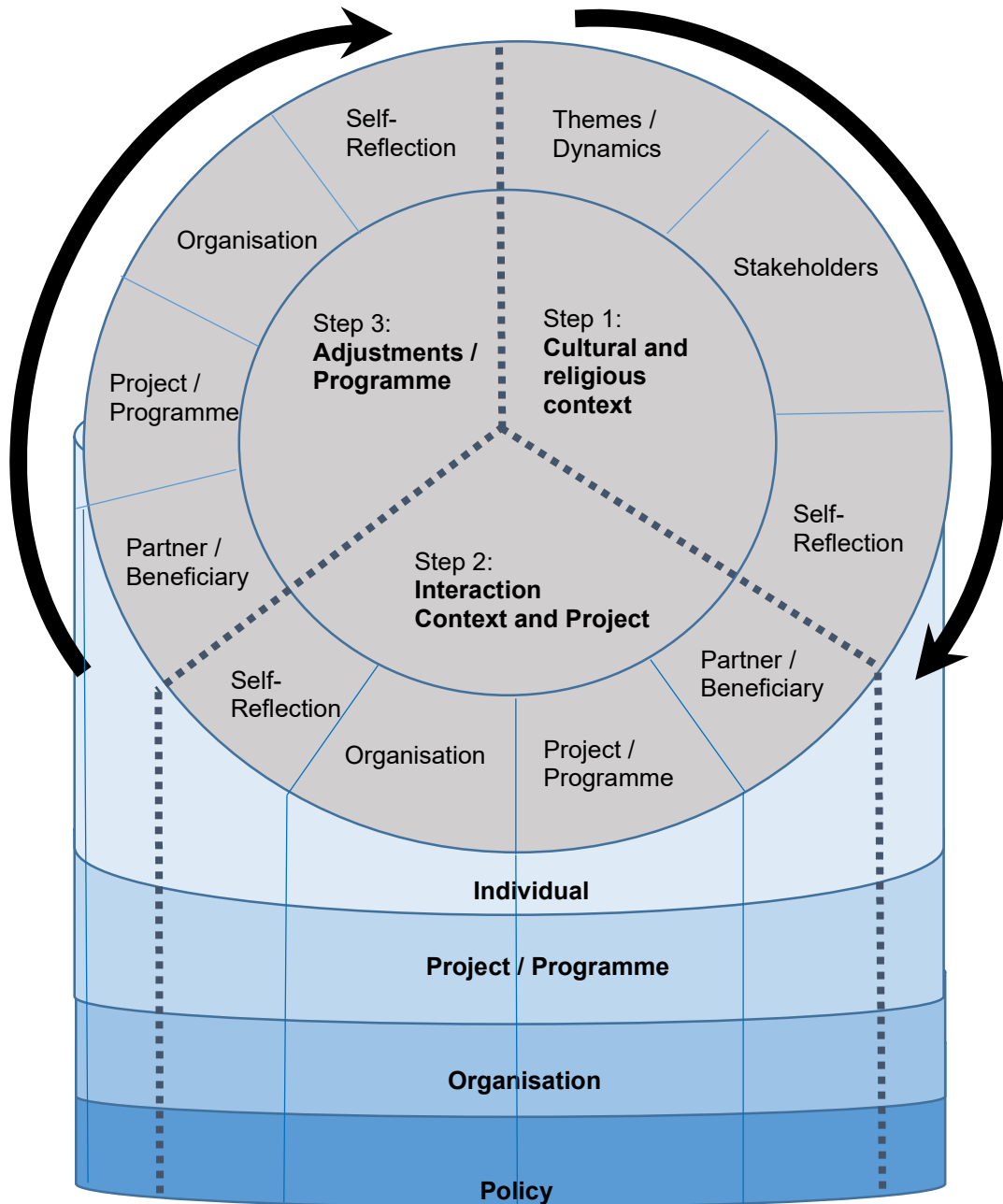
The reflection on the relevance of religious and cultural factors regarding these four levels is the focus of this guide. The steps comprised in this process of analysis and the aspects to be considered in each case will be described hereinafter in more detail.



¹ These levels correspond to the levels of the conflict sensitivity model of KOFF/swisspeace.

The reflection of religious and cultural factors in the project cycle management

The reflection of the role and importance of religious and cultural factors in the project cycle management takes place on the above four levels (individual, project / programme, organisation, policy) based on a model developed by KOFF Centre for peace building / swisspeace together with Helvetas consisting of the following three steps²:



² KOFF/Helvetas, Manual: 3 Steps for Working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (WFCS); <http://koff.swisspeace.ch/topics/conflict-sensitivity>.

The use of materials for the promotion of conflict sensitivity to increase religious and cultural sensitivity is not a coincidence. Both pursue the same objective from slightly different perspectives: improving the quality and the effect of projects and programs by considering different levels of interaction of development actors and by empowering an organization:

1. to understand the context
2. to understand the interaction between the context and the own intervention and
3. to act competently on the basis of a better understanding.

To improve the quality and impact of development cooperation, there is, first of all, a need to create awareness and information regarding the religious and cultural context in which the planned project or programme will be carried out. During the second planning step, the possible consequences of the interaction between the planned intervention and the analysed context as outlined above must be considered. Based on the resulting findings, the extent to which it is necessary to adapt the planned intervention to achieve the intended effect or to avoid unwanted side effects must be considered.

During the implementation of the three steps of analysis as well as during the further development of the PCM, the choice of appropriate tools for each step must be considered carefully. The reason is that not only the context and we ourselves are culturally and religiously inclined; but also our tools have culturally preconceived assumptions, goals and methods. Thus, in addition to the planned project itself, also the interaction between the "culturally influenced" tools which we use as part of the PCM and the context of the project must be considered carefully and continuously observed.

1. Cultural and religious context

The first step of analysis addresses the question: "In what way is the context of the proposed project / programme affected by cultural and/or religious factors?"

Where and how cultural or religious factors have a meaning and affect the quality and impact of a project (project / programme) and its associated interactions is a question which arises in all projects. However, its relevance can be very different, and the focus of observation will therefore vary based on the context and content and not based on general statistics or descriptions.

Possible topics, opportunities or pitfalls that arise from the religious and cultural factors of the project context usually appear indirectly. Open "interview questions" offer a method for sound access. Thus, by way of examples (stories / storytelling), relevant factors are identified and both explicit and implicit knowledge and behaviour can be worked out.

It is recommended that these issues be addressed in an exchange with the partner organisations and other relevant stakeholders and that the various interpretations will serve as the starting point for a common learning process. The thus achieved common understanding forms the basis for the second step described below: The analysis of the interaction between the context and the planned intervention.

The following list of questions is not exhaustive, but merely provides assistance and orientation during the implementation of the various steps of analysis. In this sense, the individual issues are not separate, but they each highlight certain aspects of overlapping parts of the whole picture.

Areas	Possible Questions	Tools / Methods (examples)
Themes / Dynamics:	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the "religious and cultural landscape" in the context of the project? • What religious or cultural values and interpretation systems are prevalent? To what extent could they be relevant for the planned project? • Which religious or secular world view is prevalent? For example: How is the interaction with the disabled; is it a charitable or an empowering approach? • Which cultural or religious factors / forces are unifying and which ones are dividing? • What is the relationship between religion and society? • What is the balance of power between the state and churches / other religious institutions? • Are the religious organisations active in political bodies? • Do political conflicts have a religious or cultural dimension? <p>Project / Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do religion and culture play implicitly or explicitly a role in e.g., the planned health, education, food, agriculture, climate, and social projects? • What religious, cultural and / or secular worldviews and interpretation systems are dominant regarding gender roles, social relations (family, communities, etc.), agriculture, health, physicality, nutrition, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context Mapping: Clustering, questioning key persons, interviews, stories • KOFF, Manual: 3 Steps for Working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (WFCS) • Other possible tools can be found in the SDC final document "Development and religion. Implications in practice. Methods and tools." (Bern 2009; specifically pages 24-27, 35/36). • Observations • Interviews • Field studies • Formulating objectives • Log frame • Sustainable Livelihood

	<p>dealing with conflicts, fear, grief, loss, war experiences, etc.?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of myths, taboos, values and morals could impact the measures? Are there places of ritual, timing, cultural or religious rules / constraints that must be considered? • Which (cultural-religious, personal, social, socio-political) change has to take place to ensure that the project has an impact? For example: "God's punishment" as an interpretation in an AIDS project. • Are there religious / cultural decision makers who are important for this? Are there religious / cultural institutions that are important for this? • What religious / cultural settings could promote or hinder the intended change? <p>Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the current regional / national / international political climate (e.g., religious / cultural conflicts elsewhere in the world)? Could it potentially have an impact on the planned project / programme? • What understanding of development prevails in the context of the project (target population, partner organisations, own organisation)? What justifications and goals does it entail? 	
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What religious and cultural institutions are present? Are there changes and why? • What kind of local Christian churches / religious denominations are present? • What kind of religious / theological orientation do they have? Which ones are historical and which ones play a role now? • What other belief systems are present in the region? • Are there religious or secular fundamentalist groups present? What brought them about? What is the impact? • Are there any rivalries or conflicts between different religious or ethnic groups? • Who are the ones in power and the decision makers? How do they impact the acceptance of the project proposal? How can they be involved? Where are the limits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visits • Participating observation • Interviews
Self-reflection	<p>What is my own attitude and impression regarding the context of the project that I am involved in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What understanding of development do I have (goals, content, reasons, previous experience, world view)? • What is important for me in the planned project and why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do I see myself in the context of the project (objectives and roles in relation to the target population and partner organisations)?• What is my understanding of the religious and cultural background of the people in the context of the project - and what do I not know? Which aspects are close to my heart (and why) and which are foreign to me?• Where does the information regarding the contextual analysis come from? Could it be that it is slanted?	
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2. The interaction between the context and project / programme

This second step of analysis should put us in a position to anticipate the interaction between the context analysed above and the intended intervention as much as possible.

For the validity and viability of the analysis, it is again important to develop it in cooperation with partners and other relevant stakeholders. Key questions in this phase are:

- In what way does the proposed project / programme fit into the cultural and religious context? What role can or should it play there?
- How could the project / programme impact the cultural / religious environment? Could it, for example, bring about or enhance tensions within the population?
- How could the religious / cultural context impact the design, content and intended effect of project / programme?³

Areas	Potential Questions	Tools / Methods, such as:
Partners and Beneficiaries	<p>Partners/Beneficiaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On what grounds and in what way was the choice of the beneficiaries made? • What is the role of the beneficiaries within the religious / cultural setting? • Are there religiously or culturally relevant stakeholders among them (e.g., leaders, minorities, etc.)? <p>• On what grounds and in what way were the project partner organisations chosen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of the project partner organisations within the religious / cultural setting? • Are there religiously or culturally relevant stakeholders among them (e.g., leaders, minorities, etc.)? <p>• What motivates the stakeholders (project partner organisations as well as a beneficiaries)? From where do they get their motivation? How does that impact the motivation and content of the project?</p> <p>Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With whom do we communicate regarding the project? Which role do they play in the overall context (see above)? • How will communication about the planned project take place (and with whom)? How is the project described and are there possibly religious and/or cultural connotations to the description and/or justifications? • How are the project partners and beneficiaries involved in the planning and implementation of the project? <p>Financing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does the funding of the project come from? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecdotes / Observations / Stories (especially stories and interpretations of institutional stakeholders such as the target population) • Reporting • Field visits • Organisational analysis, questions about the “faith identity” of the organisation, i.e. the relevance of religious convictions for its goals, culture, activities, social position, etc. • SWOT analysis

³ The following questions are based on a document on the 3-steps-model of swisspeace: KOFF Training Series 2012/2013.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cultural or religious background and motivation do the ones financing the project have? • Do the donors have a history in the context of the project, or do they even play a religious / culturally relevant role? • Could it be that the donors are affiliated with a particular religious or cultural group in the project area, and if so, what impact does that have on the project realisation? • Could the choice of donors bring about or enhance tensions within the population? <p>Coordination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any coordination of the planned project with other partners, and if so, with whom? • What is the religious / cultural role of the partners and their history in the context of the project? • Are there religiously or culturally relevant stakeholders among them (e.g., managers, fringe groups, etc.)? • Could this selection bring about or enhance any tensions within the population? • Is there a shared analysis and understanding of the religious / cultural context of the project with them? 	
Project / Programme	<p>Goals and Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the objectives and justifications regarding the project / programme relate to the local cultural and religious context? How are they understood there? To what extent are they shared (target population, partner organisations)? • Can / should the initial objectives be achieved under these circumstances? • Can / should under these circumstances the planned measures be executed in the intended way? • How do the intended goals impact the cultural / religious context? • How do the proposed measures impact the cultural / religious context? • Could the proposed objectives and measures bring about or enhance tensions within the population? <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which tools for planning, monitoring and evaluation of the project proposal are provided? • How do they relate to the cultural and religious context (understanding of time, causality, etc.)? • (How) are they being understood by the target population or by the partners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecdotes/ Observations / Stories • Project proposals • Reporting • Field visits

	<p>Geographical location of the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which role does the proposed project region play in the overall context (history, cultural / religious relevance, etc)? • How does the geographical location of the project impact the cultural / religious overall context? • Do the beneficiaries living there belong to a specific religious / cultural group, and if so, what does that mean for the objectives, measures and impact of the proposed intervention? • Could this choice bring about or enhance tensions within the population? <p>Policy / Overall context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can potential interactions between the planned intervention and the current political / religious / cultural climate (regional, national, international) be foreseen? 	
<p>Organisation</p>	<p>Work principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which working principles are there in the organisation (e.g., working hours, meals, hierarchy, flexibility, etc.)? How do they relate to the religious and cultural context? • What code of conduct guidelines are available in the organisation (e.g., security policies)? How do they impact the partners and the local population? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecdotes/ Observations / Stories • Project proposals • Reporting • Field visits
	<p>Human Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the composition of local staff? • How (and if so, where and at which level in the hierarchy) are the different religious and cultural / ethnic groups of the context represented? • What gender balance? • What is the attitude of the staff regarding the project and the context? <p>Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will be the flow of information within the organisation? • What messages will be communicated externally and in which way? • Are all employees in the organisation at the same and required level of information regarding the results of the first step of analysis (context) in order to be able to plan and act together? 	

	<p>Procurement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where and how is the material required for the planned project procured or distributed? • What are the criteria for closing purchase and service contracts? In this regard, fairness (equal treatment, award based on criteria that are clearly defined in advance) and transparency (fighting corruption) must be taken into account. • What impact will the planned procurement of materials or the planned investments, building activities, etc. have on the local economy and society? <p>Budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How flexible is the budget in view of the financing of any adaptation measures regarding the (changing) context? <p>Contextual Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the contextual analysis (step 1) be renewed regularly with the partners? Is it part of the planning and reporting? 	
<p>Self-Reflection</p>	<p>Based on the prior self-reflection from Step 1, the following question arise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is that what is important to me regarding the planned projects, still there? To what extent should the relationship between the proposed project form and my expectations be adjusted? • How do I see myself in the project context (objectives and role in relation to the target population and partner organisations)? <p>The travel report should have a section for reflecting on one's own role during the mission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How am I perceived by the beneficiaries or by the project partners? • In what situation during the trip did I feel well / unwell / welcome / foreign / irritated etc.? How do I explain that to myself? How did project partners react to this? • An (unexpected) observation / story that could be transcendent-related and result in an adjustment of the project planning. • An observation that should be discussed regarding the orientation and position of the organisation, etc. <p>“Miracle Questions”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which question irritates me when reading? For what didn't I get an answer? With which question can I show partners my genuine interest in their life reality and cultural / religious practice? • Why was a certain measure extremely successful? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecdotes/ Observations / Stories • Reporting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did something go wrong? • Where was I surprised? 	
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3. Adaption Measures

Upon completion of the analysis of the potential interactions between the planned project / programme and its context, it should be considered to which extent any changes are needed in order to avoid unwanted risks or consequences. According to the different levels of the second step of analysis, the potential adaptation measures also concern the level of the planned project / programme, the choice of partners or beneficiaries, as well as the functioning and form of their own organisation.

For example:

- Modification / extension of the project justification (e.g., religious justification)
- Changes in project financing
- Modification / extension of the partner organisations or the target group
- Targeted recruitment of members of relevant ethnic groups
- Change in work principles (e.g., regarding religious holidays)
- Change of my own role in the project / programme.

As far as possible, also this third step of analysis should be undertaken together with the partners and other relevant stakeholders.

By going through the three steps of analysis, the process for increasing the religious and cultural sensitivity of the planned intervention is by no means complete. As an integral part of the project cycle management, it should rather continue constantly and further develop.