Faith and Development in Focus: Bangladesh

A draft of a report that was a joint effort between Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion Peace and World Affairs and the World Faiths Development Dialogue.

An accessible resource for development practitioners in Bangladesh that gives an overview of Bangladesh's religious landscape and explores the religious dimensions of some development challenges. Overview of faith-inspired organizations working at the national level and profiles some noteworthy initiatives.

2015

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Table of Contents

Glossary

acharya - Hindu or Buddhist spiritual leader or teacher

adivasi - Umbrella term for indigenous and tribal groups of India

Ahl-e-Hadith - "People of the Hadith" a name given to several groups of Islamic traditionalists

Ahmadiyya - A religious group founded in 1889 in India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who claimed to be the promised Imam Mahdi whose return was foretold by the prophet Muhammad

'Alia - State-run madrasa system

ashram - Hindu spiritual hermitages

amana - Islamic concept of custodianship

ashraf - Muslim aristocratic class in historical Bengal

azan - Muslim call to prayer

bahas - Village-based debates on religious topics

Bishwa Ijtema - Annual meeting of the Tabligh Ja'maat in Bangladesh

Bichitra Tirki - Local governing body in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

burqa - An outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions

Chakma - One of the largest highland indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

chilla - Islamic teaching session

dars-i-nizami - Orthodox Islamic curriculum used in some madrasas

dawah - Preaching or proselytizing in Islam

Deobandi - Islamic revivalist movement founded in 1867 that was instrumental to the standardization of orthodox madrasa education across South Asia

Devi - The female aspect of the divine in Hinduism and the root of all goddesses

Dohara Nikaya - Buddhist *nikaya* followed by Bangladesh's Marma community

Durga - Form of the Hindu goddess Devi widely seen as "Mother Bengal;" the most important deity among Bangladesh' Hindus

Durga Puja - An annual six-day Hindu festival dedicated to the worship of Durga; the most important Hindu festival in Bangladesh

ehsar - Members of the militant wing of Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB)

Farazi - The first major Islamic revival movement in Bengal, founded by Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur in 1818

fatwa - Islamic legal opinion or interpretation issued by ulama

Hanafi - The largest of the five *fiqh* or schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence

hartals - Mass protest or strike intended to cause nation-wide shutdown

huq – In Islam, truth

ihsan - The Muslim responsibility to strive for perfection; viewed by some as justification for focus on social justice

ikhlas - In Islam, sincerity of effort

jum'ah - Friday prayer, most important weekly prayer for Muslims

kafir - In Islam, infidel or unbeliever

khuruj - Proselytizing tour of Muslims, often associated with Tablighi Jamaat

khutba - Primary formal occasion for formal sermons delivered by the imam prior to jum'ah prayer

Krishna Janmaashtami - Annual Hindu festival featuring dramatic reenactments of the life of Krishna

Madhhabs - Schools of Sunni Islamic thought with a *fiqh* or school of Islamic jurisprudence

mandir - Bengali term for temple, often with particular reference to Hindu temples

Marma - One of the largest highland indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

matbars - Respected elders and traditional village leaders in Bangladesh

Maizbhandari - One of South Asia's largest Sufi *tariqa*

Mahasthabir Nikaya - A Buddhist fraternal order founded in Bangladesh

mazar - Tomb-shrine of a Sufi saint

metta - Buddhist ideal of loving-kindness

Mukto-Mona - "freethinkers," a website founded by blogger Avijit Roy, killed in February 2015

nasihat nama - Islamic religious pamphlets

nikaya - Buddhist fraternal order

niqab - Cloth that covers the face of Muslim, often as part of the hijab

pirs - Sufi holy figures or saints

pundits - Traditional Hindu scholars

purdah - practice of female seclusion that is prevalent in many Muslim contexts

puranas - Ancient Hindu text that details the exploits of many of the deities, heroes, and sages in the Hindu pantheon

Quomi - Umbrella term for private orthodox madrasas in Bangladesh

Qur'anists - Islamic movement that rejects the authority of the hadiths and focuses exclusively on the Qur'an

rahma - In Islam, compassion or mercy

Rohingya- A Sunni Muslim ethnic group residing primarily in the Myanmar's Rakhine State

sadaqah - Islamic term meaning "voluntary charity" contrasted with *zakat*, which is obligatory charity

sadhu - Male Hindu ascetic

samaj - Bengali term for society or group

sangha - Buddhist monastic community of ordained monks or nuns

Sangharaj Nikaya- Buddhist fraternal order founded in Bangladesh

sati - A Hindu tradition in which a widow is compelled to burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre

Shakti Peethas - Sites where various parts of the goddess Shakti's body fell after her death, according to Hindu religious texts

Shaktism - Worship of the Hindu goddess Shakti, the Divine Mother

shalish - Traditional village tribunal in Bangladesh

Shavism - Worship of the Hindu god Shiva

sila - Buddhist ideal of nonviolent harmony

Sudhamma Nikaya - Buddhist *nikaya* followed primarily by the Marma people

Sundarbans - The world's largest mangrove forest, located on Bangladesh's southern coastline with the Bay of Bengal

swami - Male Hindu ascetics

tabligh - Islamic concept of piety

Tangchangya - One of the largest highland indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Tantric (Vajrayana) Buddhism - variant of Buddhism that emphasizes mystical and esoteric practices and privileges the guru-disciple relationship as a means of sacred knowledge transmission

tariqa - Sufi order (pl. *turuq*)

Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya - Nineteenth century Islamic reform movement founded by Shah Sayyid Ahmad

Theravada - Branch of Buddhism sometimes translated as the 'doctrine of the elders;' an early school of Buddhism that relies primarily on the Tipitaka, the earliest surviving Buddhist writings

Tipitaka- The earliest surviving Buddhist writings

tirthas - Hindu natural pilgrimage sites considered places of concentrated spiritual power and commonly associated with an important body of water

ulama - Muslim clerical leadership

ummah - Universal community of Muslims

union parishad - Oldest and lowest unit of governance in Bangladesh

urs - Celebrations that commemorate the life of important Sufi *pirs*

Vaishnavism - The veneration of the Hindu god Vishnu, often in the form of Rama or Krishna

Vedanta - One of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, can also refer to Indian philosophy generally

vinaya - Rules of Buddhist monastic discipline

waz mahfil - Islamic religious meetings aimed at encouraging proper praxis

zakat - A type of obligatory charitable giving or tithe in Islam

Zamindar - Feudal landlord class in historical Bengal

zinn - Spirits or supernatural creatures in Islamic mythology

Acronyms

Bangladesh Timeline

c. 900-1070	Buddhist Pala dynasty
1070-1230	Hindu Sena dynasty
1204	Conquest of Bengal by Turkic general Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji marks the beginning of Muslim rule in the region
1577	Portuguese presence formally established in Chittagong
1600	Jesuits establish first Christian church in East Bengal
1574-1765	Mughal rule in Bengal
1765-1947	British Raj, Bengal becomes a province in British India
Nineteenth century	'Bengal renaissance,, intellectual awakening that involved significant social and religious reform
1947	Independence from British colonial rule and Partition
1948	Government of Pakistan designates Urdu as the sole national language, sparking the beginning of the Bengali Language Movement
1949	Awami League established in East Pakistan to campaign for autonomy from West Pakistan
1970	Awami League, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, wins a major election victory in East Pakistan and Pakistani government refuses to recognize the results; Cyclone Bhola, the deadliest recorded tropical cyclone hits East Pakistan, killing up to 500,000 people
1971	Sheikh Mujib arrested; Awami League leaders declare independence leading to the Liberation War on 25 March; West Pakistan surrenders 16 December 1971
1972	Sheikh Mujib becomes first prime minister of Bangladesh
1975	Sheikh Mujib is assassinated in a military coup
1977	General Ziaur Rahman becomes president; Islamic language added to constitution
1981	Ziaur Rahman is assassinated during attempted military coup
1982	General Hussain Muhammad Ershad leads successful military coup, implements martial law and suspending the constitution
1986	Ershad wins 5-year term in presidential and parliamentary elections, lifts martial law and reinstates constitution
1988	Islam becomes state religion
1990	Ershad resigns in the wake of massive pro-democracy protests; subsequently is convicted of corruption and imprisoned for seven years
1991	Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of President Zia Rahman and leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), becomes prime minister

1996	Sheikh Hasina Wajed, daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and leader of the Awami League party, becomes prime minister
1998	Flooding covers more than two thirds of Bangladesh, killing over 1,000 and displacing 30 million in one of the most destructive flooding events in world history
2001	Sheikh Hasina steps down, handing over power to a caretaker government prior to elections; Khaleda Zia's BNP and coalition partners win the election
2004	Constitution amended by Parliament to reserve 45 seats for women; bomb attack on Muslim shrine in Sylhet kills 2 and injures 50
2005	Radical Islamist group Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh carries out 350 small bomb attacks nationwide
2006-2007	Elections originally scheduled for 2006 are postponed amidst an Awami-led boycott and strikes; military-backed caretaker government leads an anti-corruption drive, placing both Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, as well as hundreds of other politicians, under arrest
2007	Cyclone Sidr kills more than 4,000 and causes US$1 billion in damage
2008	Awami League wins a decisive victory in elections run by a military-backed caretaker government

Recent Events (2012-2015):

2012	May-June	Several leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, including Motiur Rahman Nizami, are charged with war crimes by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT); Jamaat supporters clash with police
	September	Series of violent attacks against Buddhist villages, monasteries, and shrines begins in Ramu upazila (Cox's Bazar District) and spreads to nearby localities; 25,000 Islamists are estimated to have participated in the violence and 300 are later arrested
	November	Fire breaks out in the Tazreen Fashion factory killing 117 people and injuring a further 200
2013	February	Abdul Quader Molla sentenced to life imprisonment by the ICT, sparking the Shahbag protests by secular activists calling for the death penalty; blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider killed by unknown assailants
	April	The Rana Plaza factory suffers major structural failure and collapses killing 1,129 garment workers and injuring a further 2,515; four bloggers are arrested for writing blog posts critical of Islam

	May	Hefazat-e-Islami, a collection of quomi madrasa students and teachers launches counter-protests in response to the Shahbag movement, including a major rally in Dhaka known as the "Dhaka siege "during which hundreds of vehicles and buildings were burned
	August	Jamaat-e-Islami political party is declared illegal by the Bangladesh Supreme Court for violating constitutional ban on religious political parties
	September	Abdul Quader Molla sentenced to death after appeal
	November	BNP supporters clash with police during protests over Awami League's refusal to turn power over to a caretaker government prior to elections, with over 500 killed in ensuing violence
	December	Abdul Quader Mola executed after death sentence is upheld by the Bangladesh Supreme Court
2014	January	Awami League's Sheikh Hasina wins a third term as prime minister in elections boycotted by the BNP
	October	Motiur Rahman Nizami and Mir Quasem Ali, two prominent Islamist political leaders, found guilty by ICT and sentenced to death
2015	January	Khaleda Zia and BNP launch strikes on the one year anniversary of the 2014 elections, leading to many violent clashes and a series of deadly bombings and arson attacks; police arrest more than 7,000
	February	Khaleda Zia and 55 others charged with instigating an arson attack on a bus that killed seven people; blogger Avijit Roy hacked to death
	March	Blogger Washiqur Rahman attacked and killed
	April	Muhammad Kamaruzzaman executed after sentence upheld
	May	Blogger Ananta Bijoy Das killed; Ansarullah Bangla Team outlawed in wake of blogger attacks

Foreword

This report, *Faith and Development in Focus: Bangladesh,* highlights the complex and occasionally strained relationship between religious and international development approaches and institutions in Bangladesh. Its goal is to provide an accessible and thorough overview of the country's surprisingly diverse faith landscape, tracing the history and contemporary landscape of major religious traditions and profiling key actors. It explores the social dimensions of religious practice as well as 'mapping' the contributions of faith-inspired organizations on critical development challenges.

The report is part of a multi-year review of the roles that religious ideas, institutions, and leaders play in the wide-ranging fields of development and social welfare undertaken by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University and the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD). Bangladesh is one of four countries of focus for the Religion and Global Development Program supported by the Henry R. Luce Foundation. Fieldwork in Bangladesh was led by Nathaniel Adams in close collaboration with Professors Syed Hashemi and Samia Huq of BRAC University, who provided invaluable support and guidance throughout the research process.

The underlying purpose is to provide a resource that can inform development policy and praxis in Bangladesh. It comes at a critical juncture in the country's history. Violent protests, attacks on religious minorities, and a series of high-profile assassinations of atheist and free-thinking bloggers threaten the nation's peace and stability. The apparent spread of violent and radical rhetoric within Bangladesh's Islamic community has stoked international concerns. Recent events expose deep divisions in Bangladeshi society, many hinging on the role of religion in maintaining social and moral order in the face of rapid social and economic transformation. They suggest new reflections on links to development strategies and new options that take religious factors more fully into account.

Bangladesh's religious landscape is complex and dynamic. Some religious actors are ambivalent or even oppositional towards certain development goals, but many more contribute actively to mainstream development efforts, either informally or through the work of faith-inspired organizations. The report highlights the wide diversity of faith-inspired actors working in development. They represent a range of ideological perspectives, and act on long traditions of social service rooted in religious teachings. We hope that recognition of this diversity and the immense cumulative impact of religious actors in everything from education to climate change adaptation will challenge the all-too-common narrative of an inherent opposition between religion and development.

Although religious actors are intimately tied to social, economic, and political dimensions of development in Bangladesh, no comprehensive resources on religion and faith-inspired development are available to policy makers and development practitioners. Thus this report represents a pioneering effort. It has, however, only scratched the surface and is part of a continuing effort as WFDD, the Berkley Center, and BRAC University work to expand the knowledge base on this critical topic.

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1. Introduction

Bangladesh has long represented a development paradox. Despite high levels of poverty and significant governance and infrastructure challenges, it has outpaced more affluent neighbors in important areas, including progress towards key Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Famously termed an international "basket case" just a few decades ago, Bangladesh has made remarkable strides in human development and has earned a reputation as an innovator, pioneering development approaches that have become internationally influential. It has seen sustained economic growth in recent years, driven by a growing export-oriented garment industry, and is poised to meet the government's goal of middle-income status by 2021. Goldman Sachs has pinpointed Bangladesh as one of the 'Next Eleven' emerging economies.[1]

Since 2013, however, Bangladesh has attracted international attention as various events have threatened to derail the country's hard-fought economic and human development gains. In addition to factory disasters including the Rana Plaza collapse, deadly episodes of communal violence, political deadlock, and the targeted killings of atheist and free-thinking bloggers by radical Islamists have shone a harsh light on Bangladesh's destabilizing internal dynamics and the fragility of Bangladeshi democratic institutions.

Religion has played no small part in the recent unrest, as a key element in political rhetoric. More worrying is the increasing prominence of new conservative Islamic groups, linked to the extensive madrasa system, that have opposed many aspects of the development agenda, particularly the economic and social empowerment of women. Since gaining independence as a secular nation in 1971, Bangladesh has seen a growing influence of Islam in public life. Some of the more visible signs of this Islamic resurgence are the emergence of new conservative Islamic groups, growth in the use of *niqab* and *burqa*, as well the increasing influence of Islamic media. Very little is known about these emerging dynamics within Bangladesh's Islamic community, from the ideology that drives some new groups to their links to political Islamists such as Jamaat-e-Islami and broader international Islamic networks.

Recent events have demonstrated that religion plays an important role in rising social and political tensions. It should thus be a key consideration for any development practitioner working in this context. However, simplistic narratives that center narrowly on Islamic extremism are of limited utility for development actors that seek to ease tensions by engaging positively with religious actors as part of inclusive and effective development strategies. This requires a nuanced understanding of Bangladesh's rapidly evolving religious landscape, based on accurate and up-to-date information, but also grounded in an historical understanding of the social, political, and cultural dimensions of religion in the

nation. When seeking out avenues for religious engagement, it is also critical to appreciate the full diversity of religious expression, the degree to which social service delivery is rooted in religious traditions, and the wide array of faith-inspired organizations that make a substantial contribution to development in Bangladesh.

It is in this context, with Bangladesh at a critical juncture, that World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) and the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs chose Bangladesh as a country of focus for their Religion and Global Development Program. The project begins to fill a gap in knowledge and provide opportunities for better dialogue and collaboration between religious and development communities. As a first step towards this goal, on January 26-27, 2014, WFDD and the Berkley Center convened a small consultation in London to discuss objectives, outputs, and potential entry points for a multi-year research program in Bangladesh and to outline a way forward. The consultation brought together leading scholars and development practitioners working at the intersection of religion and international development in Bangladesh. Their diverse perspectives and expertise provided a nuanced portrait of contemporary Bangladesh and situated this research endeavor within the existing knowledge base. It helped to identify gaps in knowledge that the research program could address and pressing Bangladeshi development challenges that might have religious dimensions. The consultation affirmed the merits of highlighting important but often obscured religious dimensions. Themes that emerged have guided the research and are reflected in the report.

Recognizing religious diversity

At a very basic level, Bangladesh's substantial religious diversity is a significant blind spot, not least among international development actors. The fact that Bangladesh is 90 percent Sunni Muslim accentuates a false narrative of homogeneity that ignores important Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian minorities, as well as the great diversity within Islamic traditions. Recognizing this diversity in meaningful ways might help counter divisive majoritarian political rhetoric and open space for inter- and intra-religious dialogue, thus contributing to a climate characterized by more tolerance and respect. Informed nonpolitical public dialogue about religion and development in Bangladesh is rare and often exclusive. Extending dialogue and enhancing its visibility could have important benefits.

Faith-inspired development

Highlighting the contributions of faith-inspired actors to development in Bangladesh could contribute to a fuller dialogue about religion more generally. As they do throughout the world, religious and development institutions in Bangladesh often take on intersecting roles and this interplay is a vitally important, but often neglected, area of policy research. A comprehensive picture of the numerous and

widespread activities of faith-inspired organizations in Bangladesh has been lacking. Faith actors representing a range of religious traditions have initiated distinctive community-based development approaches. Their innovations and service delivery approaches are well worth note.

While NGOs are often considered the dominant force in Bangladeshi civil society (it is said to have the most NGOs per capita of any country worldwide), religious actors too are omnipresent and play critical social roles. Religious ideals, rituals, and institutions are deeply embedded in the social fabric of Bangladesh, and religious actors have long been intimately involved in local governance, education, healthcare, and the provision of other social services. These organizations often do more with less, and operate on a "break even" model. There has been very limited exploration of their practical work, but there is considerable interest both in academic and development communities.

Key Development Themes

The consultation identified several key development challenges that are critically important in the Bangladeshi context, where religious actors either already make significant contributions or where they are well positioned to act. They include: Poverty Reduction, Child Health and Nutrition, Education, Gender, Climate Change, and Corruption. This report has therefore explored the faith dimensions of these challenges and the work of faith-inspired actors in these areas.

How to better engage faith groups

Through discussions there emerged several cases in which religious leaders have been successfully engaged in secular development projects, inspiring significant behavior change in their communities on issues such as child marriage and hand washing. Taking stock of both successes and failures in this regard and distilling best practices could benefit future engagement efforts. Despite considerable pessimism regarding the politicization of religion in Bangladesh, those working on such grassroots initiatives seemed more optimistic about the role of religion in civil society. From a very pragmatic perspective, institutions and leaders within Bangladesh's diverse religious communities have the potential to act as effective partners in development programs because of their presence and considerable influence in some of Bangladesh's most remote and marginalized communities.

Development approaches that engage religious leaders are important, given the sensitive nature of the religious and political context. There are obvious sensitivities around any appearance of "instrumentalizing" religious figures by external development actors. The goal must be, rather, to work with culturally influential figures and institutions to promote shared development goals. Research should thus have a two-pronged focus: knowledge creation and stakeholder engagement.

Particularly where and when it is intended to influence policy, research must be undertaken as a collaborative and participatory process. In the Bangladeshi context an inclusive approach, avoiding alienating groups or suggesting favoritism, is essential. Because many religious groups have been so little engaged in such work in the past, the hope is that current research can lay the foundations for positive dialogue. A further aim has been to build a network of religious actors that might benefit future engagement and dialogue efforts.

The Report

The report provides a country-level mapping of the intersection of religion and development in Bangladesh. It begins with a brief overview of development progress and persistent challenges in Bangladesh, with particular reference to the topics identified during the London consultation. The following section explores Bangladesh's surprisingly diverse faith landscape, providing a much needed historical perspective that contextualizes recent unrest. It analyzes the social dimensions of religion in Bangladesh, including traditions of charity and humanitarian service, but also the ways in which religious ideas have shaped social attitudes, particularly on women's empowerment. It provides a detailed look at key actors and movements, focusing extensively on Islamic actors because of their special relevance and relative under-engagement in development programs. The final section gives an overview of nationally relevant faith-inspired organizations, profiling efforts in the six focal areas, with an emphasis on programs that are distinctive in scope or vision or that involve noteworthy community-based approaches. It explores the integration of faith-inspired organizations into the broader development community through national networking platforms. It also describes efforts by development actors to engage religious leaders and reviews the potential of expanding efforts in this area.

The research was undertaken by World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) and the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, with support from the Henry R. Luce Foundation. It involved an extensive desk review of existing literature drawn from scholarly sources as well as grey literature from development actors and faith communities themselves. Fieldwork in Bangladesh, carried out between May and August of 2014 in Bangladesh by WFDD staff (with support from BRAC University), consisted of semi-structured interviews with nationally influential faith leaders and faith-inspired organizations. This mapping was limited to organizations that are formally registered with the Bureau of NGO Affairs. While grassroots faith-inspired community service organizations (CSOs) are widespread and have a great cumulative impact, this initial mapping targets the largest, most formalized, and most easily accessible organizations. Fieldwork included over 50 semi-structured interviews with key informants that explored the development work of faith actors and the religious ideas that inspire that work.

The report's focus on focal development challenges in Bangladesh is designed to support a deeper understanding of the faith dimensions of current development trends and challenges, a better picture of Bangladesh's religious landscape, and a detailed look at some of the formal and informal contributions of religious actors to priority development goals. It is intended as a resource for development actors that can better inform development policy and praxis.

2. Development in Bangladesh: An Overview

Bangladesh faces multiple, complex development challenges. As the world's eighth most populous country (160 million as of 2015), Bangladesh is also the most densely populated, apart from small city states (see table 1). Once seen as facing intractable problems of poverty, Bangladesh is experiencing quite robust economic growth (around six percent annually in recent years), and in some areas social progress has defied expectations; in terms of life expectancy and health, Bangladesh has better results than many countries at similar income levels. Development is set against a background of tumultuous politics since independence and distinctly mixed economic management performance. The active civil society, with its sharp focus on social services and bold anti-poverty programs, accounts for much progress as do forthright social policies (including family planning), remittances from migrants, and the robust textile sector. Bangladesh, however, is still a low-income country, classified by some measures as a fragile state[2], and some 31.5 percent of the population falls below the national poverty line.[3] Bangladesh is one of the world's most vulnerable countries in term of climate risk, with large parts of the country near sea level and a heavy impact of weather patterns. Governance problems are deeply engrained and stubbornly persistent. Extremism, most linked to political Islam, has increased in recent years.[4]

Table 1. Bangladesh: Some key development facts

Population: 160 m (2015)
Area: 147570 sq. km
Urban population: 33 percent (2013, World Bank)
Population growth rate: 1.2 percent pa (World Bank)
Capital city population (Dhaka): 14.5 million (Government of Bangladesh)
Population aged 0-14 years: 30 percent (UNDP, 2013)
GNI per capita (Atlas Method – World Bank, 2013) US$1,010
UNDP 2014 Human Development Index: Rank 142 of 187
Corruption Perceptions Index 2014: 142 of 174[5]
Remittance income: 10 percent of national GDP (2013) [6]

Geography plays an important role in Bangladesh's development prospects. Located in South Asia on the delta of the Ganges and Jamuna (Brahmaputra) rivers, the two largest rivers of the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh borders India to the east, north, and west,

Myanmar to the southeast, and has a large, marshy coastline on the northern littoral of the Bay of Bengal to the south. At an average of about 10 meters above sea level, parts of the country flood annually due to heavy seasonal rainfall, and most areas are subject to flooding as the result of cyclones and other major natural disasters. About 80 percent is made up by the fertile alluvial lowland known as the Bangladesh Plain, and the Chittagong Hills, which rise steeply in the southeast, are the only significant hill system. The population of about 160 million is most densely clustered in the Dhaka and Comilla urban regions, while the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Sundarbans, an area of mangrove forest in the southwest, are the least densely populated.

Development policies set ambitious goals. The Bangladesh Perspective Plan for 2010-2021[7] sets out the government's official development policy and is translated into five-year plans: the Sixth Five Year Plan (2011-2015) and the Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2021) are the most recent (2021 will be the 50th anniversary of independence). The plan sets out ambitious goals: "The expectation is that by 2021, the war against poverty will have been won, the country will have crossed the middle income threshold, with the basic needs of the population ensured, their basic rights respected, when everyone is adequately fed, clothed and housed, and have access to healthcare. And all this is achieved on a sustainable basis without damaging the environment. Furthermore, this progress will be ensured in an environment where every citizen has the opportunity fully and positively to contribute to the economy and society and equitably share the benefits from progress achieved."[8] Focusing on the United Nations Millennium Development Goal targets, Bangladesh is likely to meet most if not all targets by the 2015 deadline (see table 2). [9]

Table 2. Progress towards Millennium Development Goals in Bangladesh

Goal	Targets	Progress (as of 2012/2013)
Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Halve proportion living on less than $1.25/day	Slow
	Achieve full employment, including women and youth	On track
	Halve proportion of people who are hungry	On track
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	Primary enrollment	Not enough data
	Reaching last grade	Not enough data
	Primary completion	Not enough data
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	Gender equality in primary education	Not enough data
	Gender equality in secondary education	Early achiever
	Gender equality in tertiary education	Slow

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality	Reduce the under-five mortality rate by two thirds	Early achiever
	Reduce infant mortality by two thirds	On track
Goals 5: Improve maternal health	Reduce the maternal mortality ratio by two thirds	On track
	Skilled birth attendance	Slow
	Antenatal care	Slow
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	HIV prevalence	On track
	TB incidence	On track
	TB prevalence	Early achiever
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	Forest cover	Regressing/no progress
	Protected area	Early achiever
	CO2 emissions per GDP	Regressing/no progress
	Safe drinking water	Slow
	Basic sanitation	Slow

Source: UNDP. 2012/2013. "Asia-Pacific Aspirations: Perspectives for a Post-2015 Development Agenda." Available at: http://www.adb.org/publications/asia-pacific-aspirations-perspectives-post-2015-development-agenda

A tense political context is not conducive to development. Contemporary development discussions and work are set within a complex and tense political context, with the politics of religion near the center. The two party system (termed dysfunctional by the *Economist*)[10] has resulted in rotating offices since 1991, but the Awami League (the party of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina) has ruled since 2006. Matters reached a crisis when the main opposition party, the BNP, boycotted the January 2014 elections. With their coalition partner, the main Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, they contest the fairness of that election, and one result is continuous demonstrations and sporadic violence. An uneasy peace, punctuated by incidents of sporadic violence, prevails. The government claims that the opposition supports acts of vandalism and terrorism while the opposition accuses the government of trying to create a one-party state. Meanwhile the government has proceeded since 2009 with an International War Crimes Tribunal focused on the 1970-71 Liberation War. Verdicts and death sentences handed down, many against leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami and the BNP, have sparked violent reactions, contributing to what amounts to a political stalemate that accentuates Bangladesh's long-standing weak governance. The verdicts also contribute to increased political and religiously motivated violence, with attacks on religious minorities and violent clashes with police. Threatening

further destabilization, corruption has a pervasive impact on the everyday lives of Bangladeshis where bribery and extortion are common experiences for citizens in their relationship to public services.

The "development community" is active and plays important roles. Bangladesh relies relatively heavily on development assistance and many international development institutions have long-standing, significant programs. Between 2003 and 2012 Bangladesh received US$16 billion in official development assistance (ODA), making it the twelfth largest recipient. In the last ten years the proportion of ODA that has been humanitarian assistance has averaged five percent, ranging from one percent in 2006 to nine percent in 2009. Bangladesh received the equivalent of two percent of its gross national income (GNI) as aid (ODA) in 2012.[11] Virtually all the major development institutions, multilateral, bilateral, and NGO, have programs in Bangladesh and there are numerous public private partnerships. A Joint Cooperation Strategy was agreed upon in 2010, signed by 18 partners, highlighting that the Government of Bangladesh plays the leading role.[12] Aid coordination is set within the framework of the High Level Bangladesh Development Forum. Aid coordination is, nonetheless, a continuing challenge. The focus of partnerships varies but common themes are poverty alleviation, mitigation of climate change and disaster preparedness, human development (health and education), infrastructure development, and governance reform. Disasters in the garment industry (especially the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse) have focused attention on that sector.

Defining priority development issues is far from easy given their wide range and depth. This report's central challenge is to relate the development challenges facing Bangladesh to religious institutions, beliefs, actors, and trends. The following paragraphs briefly introduce pertinent development issues in that light; more detailed analysis comes later in the report. The focus reflects both issues emerging from Berkley Center/WFDD/BRAC University research and counsel of the project advisory group during the January 2014 London consultation.

Peace and communal harmony are growing concerns, with many religious dimensions. Since 2013, Bangladesh has experienced some of the worst communal violence since the bloody Liberation War, with hundreds killed and thousands injured. Much of the violence has been directed at religious minorities with Hindu communities bearing the brunt of attacks. In 2013 alone, 94 major incidents of violence against religious minorities were reported, with 202 temples and shrines vandalized and burned. Violence against religious minorities has complex social and historical dimensions, but political events are in large measure the spark.

Extreme poverty remains an important focus for development policy and the surrounding issues and focus are highly relevant for religious communities and leaders. Especially relevant are rural poverty, marginalized populations, and the welfare of children and women. Expanding economic roles for women, particularly in the booming garment sector, have religious dimensions as their social roles change. Overall, economic growth

has resulted in significant reductions in poverty but also accentuates problems, notably patently inadequate infrastructure, especially in cities, and strains on government service delivery capacity.

Figure 1. GDP per Capita (Constant 2005 US $)
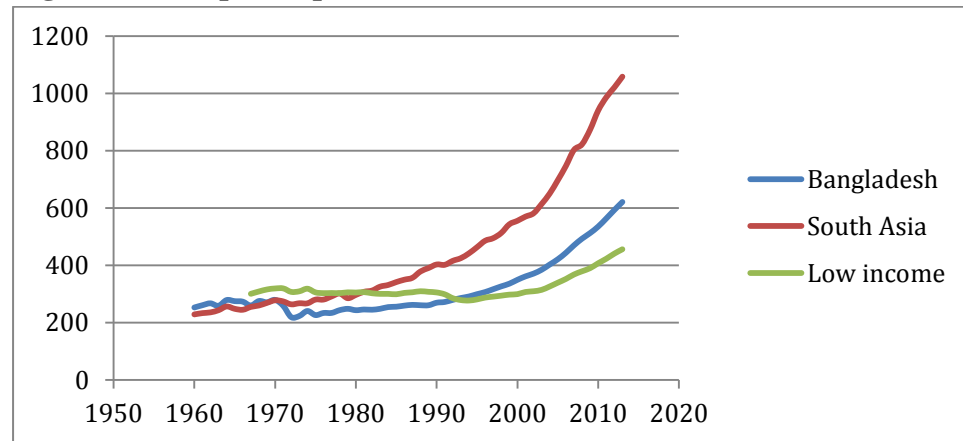
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank 2014

Box 1. Disasters in the garment sector_____

Rapid growth, a weak regulatory framework, and pressures to keep costs rock bottom low combine with corruption among factory inspectors and local governments to explain workplace safety issues and other issues of concern around working conditions. These were highlighted by the Rana Plaza collapse in April 2013 that killed 1,130 people and injured a further 2,515, making it the world's deadliest garment factory accident.[13]
End of box?

Child health and nutrition present a mixed picture of progress and challenges but major issues remain. Child welfare is a major focus of both government and partner efforts (see the multi-stakeholder initiative to reduce preventable child death to 20 per 1,000 live births by 2035).[14] The Children Act, enacted to ensure that Bangladesh complies with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, was passed in 2013.[15] Progress in reducing underweight and stunting (inadequate height for age, the result of malnutrition) rates and child and infant mortality has been significant. There has been less progress in impoverished and marginalized communities where food insecurity and under-nutrition pose serious concerns for child health. Malnutrition remains a serious problem and Bangladesh ranks as one of the countries with the largest number of children under five who are moderately or severely stunted, and fifth of the ten countries most affected by wasting. One study found 46 percent of under-five children stunted, 15 percent wasted, and 40 percent underweight.[16]

Figure 2. Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)
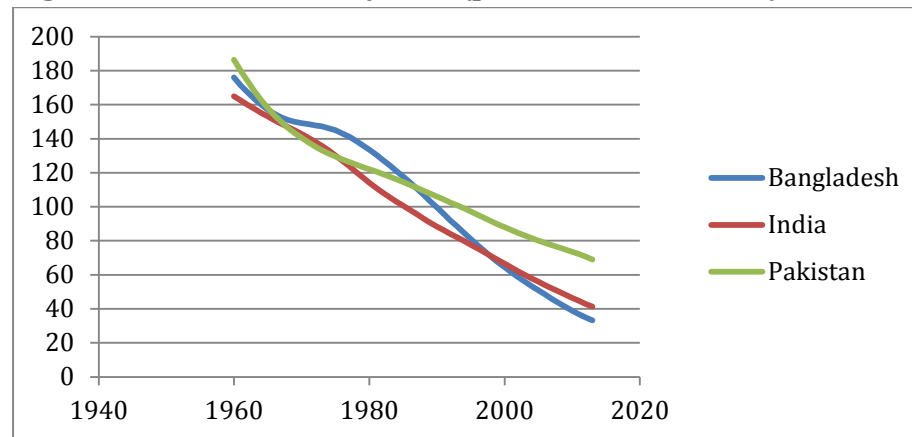
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank 2014

Education is often cited as the leading priority for development and, again, there are many religious dimensions to both progress and remaining challenges. Bangladesh has made great strides in enrollment: primary school enrollment increased from 60 percent in 1990 to 92 percent in 2012.[17][18] Gender parity has been largely achieved at the primary level, driven primarily by gender-focused public interventions, including stipends or exemption from school fees for girls, particularly in rural areas, increased access provided by madrasas and NGO-run schools, and changing social norms.[19] There are still only 69 women for every 100 men enrolled in tertiary education.[20] Challenges for the education sector center on widespread quality issues, low retention, and pockets of poor access, especially at secondary and tertiary level. Completion rates for the five-year primary school cycle are only 50.7 percent, and the average number of years to complete the cycle is 8.6 years.[21] Bangladesh's embedded corruption presents significant problems for education. Despite nominally free education, demands for payment are common and government provided cash stipends may not be paid out. Bribes can influence exam pass rates.[22] Student-teacher contact time is one of the lowest in the world, at an average of only 2.5 hours per day.[23] Religiously run schools (*'Alia* and *Quomi* madrasas) are an important yet often contentious part of the school system, as is teaching of religion in schools (see below).

Gender issues are central both to development policy and to the intersection of religion and development. Bangladesh has progressed on various fronts related to gender, with strengths and weaknesses illustrated in various World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap measures. However, gender inequity is widespread, bolstered by cultural traditions that include ingrained religious attitudes that contest women's equality. In 2013 Bangladesh ranked 75 out of 136 countries. An important issue is maternal health and mortality, where, notwithstanding major recent progress, rates are high (240 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2012, an estimated 12,000 deaths a year). Bangladesh has one of the world's highest adolescent motherhood rates, closely linked with child marriage. In 2007, one third of women had their first child before they were 20 years old. Unequal power dynamics in child marriages make it very difficult for girls to use birth control or refuse sex.[24]

Table 3. World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2014

Indicator	Rank	Female-to-Male Ratio
Overall country rank	**68 (out of 142)**	**-**
Overall score	**0.697 (0=inequality, 1=equality)**	**-**
Economic participation and opportunity	127	-
Labor force participation	94	0.70
Wage equality for similar work	105	0.57
Estimated earned income	102	0.52
Educational attainment	**111**	-
Literacy rate	109	0.88
Primary enrollment	1	1.04
Secondary enrollment	1	1.16
Tertiary enrollment	118	0.69
Health and survival	122	-
Sex ratio at birth	1	0.96
Healthy life expectancy	131	0.96
Political empowerment	10	-
Women in parliament	75	0.25
Women in ministerial positions	122	0.07
Years with female head of state	3	0.70

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2014, World Economic Forum

Women's political representation and empowerment are important issues. About 20 percent of parliamentary seats are held by women, and two women leaders—Khaleda Zia of the BNP and Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League—have alternated in the offices of Prime Minister and opposition leader for 20 years.[25] But the political arena is highly gendered. Many women politicians come from Bangladesh's influential political families, "understood to be proxies, contesting seats on behalf of disqualified or jailed male family members."[26] Women's participation in parliament has been lower than in other countries in the region.

Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is a pervasive and persistent problem and may have increased in recent years.[27] It is rooted in a complex social, economic, and religious context colored by poverty, child marriage, and the practice of dowry.[28] Acid attacks are quite common; the Acid Survivors Foundation notes that reasons cited for individual acid attacks are often that the victim has "transgress[ed] conventional norms that relegate women to subordinate positions. Indeed, a significant portion of attacks occur when a woman exercises decision-making power by rejecting a marriage or 'love' proposal."[29] More than a third of women and men believe that it is justifiable for men to beat their wives under certain circumstances, such as an argument.[30]

Women's economic empowerment is a central change to the development agenda, accounting for progress but also contestation. Labor force participation, particularly in the garment industry, is closely linked to changes in social norms, but women's increasing autonomy has sparked backlash, particularly from conservative religious groups as well as within communities and homes. Because of the garment industry's rapid growth—garment exports grew to more than 23 percent of Bangladesh's GDP in 2011 from five percent in 1990—women's employment in the garment industry has had an outsized impact on social norms.[31] Positive effects on women and girls include increased autonomy and improving health and other development outcomes. Women, particularly in urban areas, have negotiated and challenged gendered roles and duties within their households. One study found that garment jobs increase the rate of younger girls' enrollment in school because of higher demand for jobs for women that require an education, and because parents who work in the sector have higher incomes.[32] Women, however, directly confront various problems facing the garment sector, notably poor working conditions. Women can face violence and exploitation. The backlash from conservative religious groups is discussed in more detail below. Beginning in the 1990s, local ulama, madrasa teachers, and other religious leaders organized rallies outside of factories protesting the loose moral character of the 'garment girls'.[33]

Both awareness of climate change risks and real observable changes have significant effects on development policies and debates. Given the wide impact and ethical dimensions, religious actors and some faith-inspired organizations are taking the lead in this area. Demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic features make Bangladesh especially vulnerable to natural disasters and more than 70 major disasters (notably cyclones and floods) between 2000 and 2009 directly affected over 30 million people.[34] The economic impact is large, with an estimated US$5 billion in revenue, or ten percent of GDP, lost during the largest events, the 1991 cyclone and 1998 flood. Some 8.5 million Bangladeshis live in drought-prone areas and a third in coastal zones. Food security is also threatened;[35] the majority of Bangladesh's population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. This explains the focus at the international and national level on disaster preparedness and mitigation and adaptation. The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2009 lays out national policies and the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCT) and the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF) reflect government-led efforts to mobilize finance.

Governance is a leading issue for Bangladesh. Again, practical and ethical dimensions suggest that engaging religious actors makes eminent sense. Poor governance and especially corrupt practices are widespread and much discussed. A 2013 survey indicated that 39 percent of those surveyed reported having to pay a bribe to access services, and 100 percent said they were willing to become involved in corrupt activities.[36] The World Bank's 2012 Worldwide Governance Indicators scored Bangladesh in the lowest quarter of country percentile ranks, 21.1 out of 100 on "control of corruption".[37] Bangladesh is at the bottom of the World Justice Project's annual Rule of Law index in 2013 across a variety of measures of good governance, including 97 (out of 97 countries) in civil

justice, 90 in regulatory enforcement, and 89 in corruption.[38] Corruption has widespread effects, including on human capital development, because it limits access to government-provided services: "intimidation, bribery, and extortion are common in citizen's interaction with state services."[39] Transparency International Bangladesh estimates that the cost of bribery increased from 8.7 percent of the annual national budget in 2010 to 13.6 percent in 2012. The impact is greatest on poor communities both because they depend on services and they cannot provide even small informal payments: bribery accounted for 5.3 percent of poor households annual expenditures, but 1.3 percent for the more affluent.[40] Political institutions, including political parties and parliament, are perceived to be among the most corrupt institutions in the country: 62 percent of those surveyed perceived the political parties to be corrupt, and 40 percent perceived parliament this way.[41] Corruption also reduces the impact of investment through international development aid.

2.1 Why consider religion in Bangladesh's development?

Development actors, with some significant exceptions, have rarely engaged directly and explicitly with religious issues and institutions in Bangladesh, and understanding among international organizations about religious issues can be patchy. This is in keeping with the common practice in international circles. Bangladeshi authorities have tended to approach religious institutions with caution. This report aims to help address ingrained development challenges and mounting social tensions in Bangladesh by providing a deeper understanding of current development trends and challenges, a better picture of Bangladesh's religious landscape, and a detailed look at some of the formal and informal contributions of religious actors to priority development goals. It is intended as a resource for development actors with a view to informing policies and understanding of development issues and approaches. The buy-in of religious leaders can be important to the success of development efforts in many instances; however, there have been cases where local religious leaders oppose specific development activities and strategies. Some of these contradictions and tensions arise from the fact that most religious leaders and institutions have limited exposure to and misunderstandings of development activities and approaches.

Bangladesh is well known for its robust civil society, particularly its local NGOs, which are some of the world's most well-known. Less attention has been paid to the development roles of religious actors in civil society, although they have been intimately involved in charity work and the provision of social services in their communities for centuries. Accounting for everything from grassroots faith-based CSOs to international FIOs and religious societies, there are estimates that Bangladesh has upwards of 200,000 religious organizations. While some development organizations have engaged with religious actors, this type of collaboration has been limited due to patchy knowledge about religious institutions and actors.

Bangladesh is a highly religious Muslim majority country with polls suggesting that religion plays a significant role in the lives of nearly every Bangladeshi. There is likewise a great amount of trust placed in religious leaders and institutions. Particularly in rural areas, mosques and religious leaders have played central roles in governance and dispute arbitration. Religious institutions were the traditional providers of social services including education, care for the poor and destitute, and even building local infrastructure. Religious institutions in minority faith communities, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian organizations provide critical material and social support to their communities and have been central to their community solidarity. Many place more trust and confidence in these institutions than they do in public entities or in NGOs because of their history, association with religious values, and embeddedness within their community.

When religious leaders speak out on development topics they can have a significant impact on social attitudes and behavior. Given their influence, religious actors play a major role in the formation or alteration of social norms and are often opinion makers on social issues important to development outcomes and priorities. It is also the case that religious leaders and institutions can be gatekeepers who oppose specific development activities and strategies. In such cases, limited exposure to and misunderstandings of development activities and approaches can be the reason for suspicion and disinterest from local religious leaders. There is a wide variability in the social attitudes of religious leaders at present; consequently their impact on various development concerns in Bangladesh has been both positive and negative.

Religious leaders have been relatively unengaged; a noteworthy exception is the Leaders of Influence Program undertaken by the Asia Foundation in collaboration with the Islamic Foundation's Imam Training Academy that sought to expose religious leaders to development programs ranging from health to agriculture. Outcomes of this effort and others like it in Bangladesh have been promising, but their scope has been limited. Because they often work through preexisting networks of religious leaders friendly to the government, very few programs target religious leaders known to have hostile attitudes towards the development agenda. Likewise religious women are critical actors to engage in efforts to achieve gender equality in Bangladesh, but they are often invisible and there is a need for new and creative approaches to engaging this group.

Development actors who see the value in partnerships and collaboration with religious leaders, especially for local buy-in and community participation, must negotiate entry points as they do with other community leaders, but many lack religious literacy. This overview of religion in Bangladesh, highlights Bangladesh's religious diversity and also points to potential entry points for constructive engagement with religious actors on key development issues, in part by highlighting examples of ongoing faith-inspired work on the topic.

3. Religion in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh as in many other countries religion is a central feature in people's lives and development and religious actors often play intersecting roles. Various English and Bengali language resources on religion in Bangladesh exist but they can be challenging to locate and are often fragmentary or too narrowly focused. The following overview provides a thorough and inclusive description of religious communities and traditions in Bangladesh with particular attention to their social dimensions. The goal is to enhance the religious literacy of development actors working in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has a majority Muslim population. The Pew Global Religion Landscape Survey reports that roughly 90 percent of Bangladeshis are followers of Sunni Islam and adhere to the Hanafi legal tradition.[42] Islamic communities in Bangladesh, however, are not as homogenous as this figure suggests. Diversity in belief and practice is in part due to the longstanding influence of Sufi missionaries, who often absorbed and incorporated indigenous spiritual traditions. Heterodoxy and syncretism are significant features of Bangladeshi Islam, particularly in rural areas. There are many international and localized Sufi orders in Bangladesh, as well as small but significant Ismaili and Ahmadiya Muslim communities.

Figure 3. Religion in Bangladesh
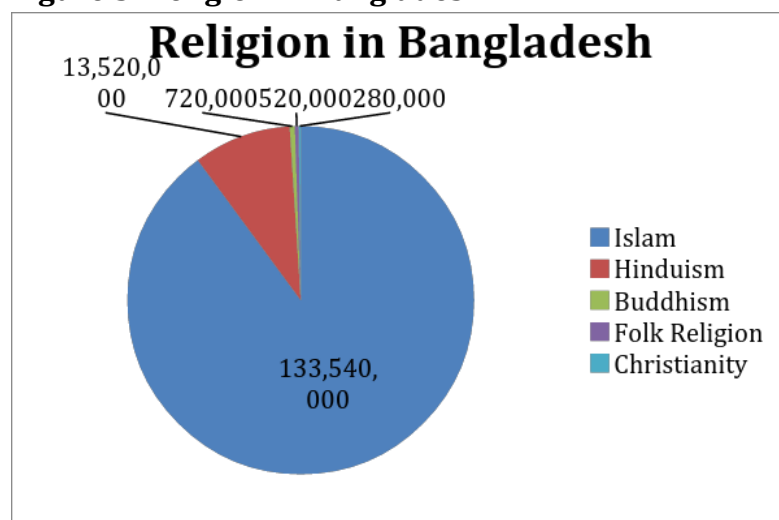
Source: Pew Research Center 2012

Several important religious minorities in Bangladesh reflect the diverse faith traditions that have been influential in the historical region of Bengal over the millennia. The Hindu population comprised nearly a third of the population at the time of Partition in 1947, but the numbers have declined significantly over the 70 subsequent years. At 9.1 percent of the national population, Hindus today are Bangladesh's largest religious minority. Buddhist communities, concentrated mainly

in the Chittagong region, make up another 0.5 percent. Christians, from a range of denominations, live throughout the country, and though they constitute a mere 0.2 percent of the population, they have had a large influence on development in Bangladesh since independence.[43] Small communities of animists, Baha'is, Sikhs, and Jains also have a presence in Bangladesh.

3.1 Religion in Public Life

For many Bangladeshis, religion pervades all aspects of life, both public and private. Religious leaders, groups, and institutions play important supportive roles in people's everyday lives, and in most cases Bangladeshis place a much higher degree of trust in religious actors than the government, which is often perceived as corrupt and ineffective. According to a recent Gallup survey, 98 percent of Bangladeshi adults had confidence in religious organizations.[44] The surveys found other indicators of religiosity equally high (see figure 4). One hundred percent of Bangladeshi adults surveyed claimed that religion is an important part of their daily lives and 86 percent had attended a place of worship in the past week.[45] Religious ideas and values are also widely influential, as a recent Pew Forum poll found, 78 percent of respondents reported to read the Qur'an regularly[46].

As religious actors and institutions are trusted by Bangladeshis they can be powerful and effective development partners. However, given its pervasiveness and emotive nature, religion has also been co-opted for various social and political causes, which has often resulted in violence and unrest. There is an increasingly contentious divide between secularists and Islamists in Bangladesh that is well illustrated by recent unrest, and likewise a longstanding narrative of inherent antagonism between the religious communities and development efforts. Points of contention have centered on changing social norms, particularly related to increasing rights and agency for women. A Pew survey found that 55 percent of Bangladeshis considered there to be a conflict between religion and modern society, the second highest rate in the Muslim world[47].

Figure 4. Is religion an important part of your daily life?

Is religion an important part of your daily life?
Asked of Bangladeshi adults

Yes

96% (2006)
99% (2007)
99% (2008)
100% (2009)
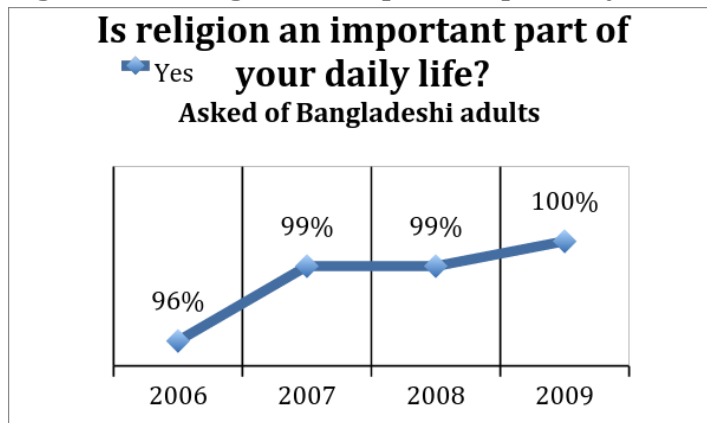
Figure 5. Religiosity in Bangladesh

Religiosity in Bangladesh

- Have attended a place of worship or religious service in the last seven days
- Have confidence in religious organizations

	May-06	May-07	Jun-08	May-09
Attended worship	81%	81%	79%	86%
Confidence in religious orgs	92%	88%	94%	98%
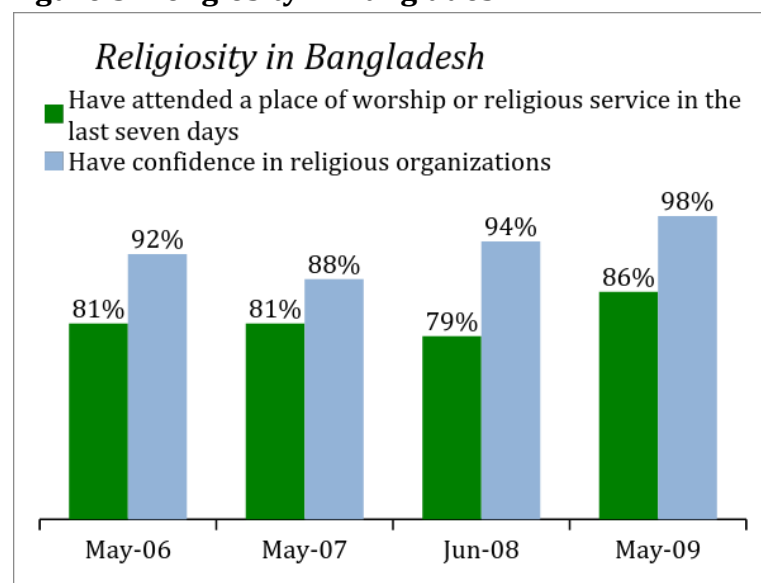
Source: Gallup 2009

Islam has been a controversial element in the construction of national identity of Bangladesh, notably in the context of the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent and the 1971 Liberation War that gave birth to the nation of Bangladesh. Recognizing this legacy is important to understanding the complex and disputed position Islam currently holds in Bangladeshi society and the roots of political and communal conflict today.

Eastern Bengal has long had a high concentration of Muslims; this 'religious cohesiveness' justified the region's inclusion in Pakistan, despite is geographical separation, at the time of Partition. However, it was not long before the economic, political, and linguistic hegemony of West Pakistan caused many Bengalis, particularly intellectuals and activists associated with University of Dhaka, to conclude that they had simply traded one colonial yoke for another.[48] The Language Movement began in 1952 and championed an identity grounded in Bengali language and culture, in opposition to the Muslim identity that was the *raison d'être* for the Pakistani state. This was the beginning of the Bengali Nationalist Movement, leading

to a struggle that the Pakistani state tended to frame in Islamic terms. Bengali nationalists were labeled *kafirs* or infidels by the Pakistani regime.[49] The population of then East Pakistan was deeply divided. Many within the Bengali orthodox Islamic communities, particularly those associated with the Islamist political parties including Jamaat-e-Islami, were concerned about the threat to the ummah or universal Islamic community and formed militias to support Pakistani troops to keep the Islamic state united during the nine-month Liberation War. When the nationalists finally won independence under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League, they sought to address the perceived exploitation of religion by the Pakistani regime and severe discrimination faced by religious minorities, including the massacre of Hindus. They made secularism one of the central pillars of their nationalist project.

Box 2. Secularism in Bangladesh

Secularism was one of four fundamental principles outlined in the preamble to Bangladesh's constitution, which was adopted on 4 November 1972, along with nationalism, socialism, and democracy. To achieve these secular aims, Article 12 of the constitution called for the elimination of: "communalism in all its forms; the granting by the state of political status in favor of any religion; the abuse of religion for political purposes; and any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion". Religious political parties were also explicitly banned in the constitution. Article 38 granted the freedom of Bangladeshis to form associations, but stated that "no person shall have the right to form, or be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of, any communal or other association or union which in the name or on the basis of any religion has for its object, or pursues, a political purpose."
------------(end of box)

Despite the secular identity of the new state, the people remained strongly Islamic in their beliefs and practices and first president of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib) sought to placate critics with broadly popular Islamic initiatives in the face of mounting internal criticism over misgovernance in 1974. He aligned Bangladesh more strongly with the Islamic Bloc, tripled funding for state-run madrasas, and revived the Islamic Academy (renamed the Islamic Foundation), which was tasked with propagating Islamic ideals in Bangladeshi society.[50] Mujib was assassinated in a 1975 coup, ushering in the successive autocratic military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman (1977-1981) and Hussain Muhammed Ershad (1983-1990) who increasingly sought to be seen as patrons of Islam to legitimize their regimes.

The constitution has become a battleground in relation to the role of Islam in state affairs. In 1977 Ziaur Rahman amended the constitution by including the phrase "Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim" ("in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful") in the constitution's preamble, replacing "secularism" as a national pillar

with "absolute faith and trust in the Almighty Allah." Using phrasing that evokes the spirit of nineteenth century Islamic reformers, socialism was replaced with "economic and social justice."[51] His regime further expanded madrasa education, as well as making Islamic Studies a compulsory subject in all public schools. Islamic programs were expanded significantly and given prominence in government-controlled media.[52]

The passage of the Political Parties Regulations (PPR) Act in 1976 allowed Islamist parties back into the political arena. When Ziaur Rahman was himself assassinated in 1981, his eventual successor Hussain Muhammed Ershad faced a similar crisis of legitimacy and significant Islamist agitation. He introduced a constitutional amendment in 1988 declaring Islam the state religion in an attempt to earn the support of the Islamists. Democracy was reestablished in 1991, and the ruling Awami League has worked to restore the constitution to its original character. While the Awami League has reinstated secularism as a state pillar, Islam remains the state religion. Bangladesh's current status as secular nation with Islam as the state religion illustrates well the debate in Bangladesh over the religion's place in the public sphere since independence.

Box 3. Communal violence and religious minorities

Communal violence in Bangladesh, particularly since 2013, has increased to some of the worst levels since the Liberation War. The increasingly contentious divide between the Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP), heir to Ziaur Rahman's Bangladeshi-Muslim-Nationalism, and the Awami League, heir to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Bengali-Secular-Nationalism, often plays off religious identity and exploits religious passions. Much of the recent political violence, which has killed hundreds and displaced thousands, has been directed at religious minorities.

Historically, much of the communal violence in Bangladesh since Partition has been directed at pushing minority communities out of the country in an effort to eliminate their political influence, particularly Hindus, who are often viewed as likely voters for the Awami League. Bangladesh's religious minorities have been steadily shrinking as a result of communal unrest.

Religious minorities have been increasingly vocal in defense of their rights and in advocating for a renewed national commitment to secular principles and religious plurality. One of the most significant organizations in this regard is the Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Unity Council, which works to document and publicize attacks on religious minorities and advocate on behalf of religious and ethnic minorities.
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3.2 Islam in Bangladesh

Islam is the religion of roughly 90 percent of Bangladesh's population, or around 148.6 million people, giving Bangladesh the fourth largest Muslim population globally. The Islamic faith is central in the daily lives of most Bangladeshis, but beyond this deep cultural influence, Islam in Bangladesh has tended to be dominated by deeply political dimensions. The highly political flavor of religious discussion poses challenges for development practitioners wishing to engage religious figures or institutions, but a nuanced, historically-informed understanding of the various subsets within the Islamic community can help development practitioners devise strategies to overcome these challenges.

The long and unique history of Islam in Bangladesh has not only influenced shared national values and ideals, but it has also influenced the evolution of religious institutions and traditions that form the traditional basis of local power structures. Islamic institutions had traditional roles in everything from education to local legal arbitration and continue to be influential and held in high esteem in many parts of Bangladesh.

3.2.1 Islam arrives in Bangladesh

Islam was first introduced into what is now Bangladesh by Muslim traders in the ninth and tenth centuries CE; however, conversions in this early era were likely minimal. With the conquest of Bengal by Turkic general Muhammad Bakhtiyar in 1204, Islam was established as a courtly religion, but it remained influential only within the elite Muslim aristocracy known as *ashraf*. This continued through several subsequent Muslim dynasties that controlled the region.

The first Islamic figures to actively proselytize widely throughout eastern Bengal were the Sufis who came to the area following Mongol invasions that pushed many Turkic groups out of their central Asian homelands and into newly conquered territories. Some of these itinerate groups were led by charismatic Sufi mystics who settled and formed religious communities in the hinterlands of Bengal.[53] As in other parts of the world, Sufis in Bengal often absorbed and incorporated elements of indigenous faith traditions. It is a commonly repeated claim that this strong Sufi legacy has contributed in part to Bangladesh's traditionally moderate and tolerant approach to the Islamic faith.[54] Sufi groups remain an influential grassroots religious movement in Bangladesh; the current influence of Sufis is explored in more detail below.

Bengal's eastern frontiers, or what is today Bangladesh, saw significant conversions as Islam became enmeshed in the grassroots social structure in ways that differed from most areas of the subcontinent. Several theories attempt to explain the quite remarkable spread of Islam in east Bengal. Historian Richard Eaton in a seminal

work suggests that Islam was adopted by broad swaths of the peasantry only when Bengal came under Mughal control (1574-1765). A Mughal campaign to expand rice cultivation into the lightly settled Ganges delta and eastern frontiers offered land grants to religious gentry, mullahs, returned pilgrims, and holy men (*pirs*). In this context Islam acted as a "civilization building ideology" or a "religion of the plow" that came to form the basis for the grassroots social structure in these rural areas.[55]

The new communities were often anchored by a mosque or Sufi shrine known as a *mazar*. Each village established at least one society or *samaj* composed of respected elders (*matbars*) who were responsible for resolving community problems at a village tribunal known as a *shalish*. These *samaj* are typically centered on the local mosque and *matbars* typically developed their public reputation by serving on Mosque committees. These social structures are still influential in many rural areas, but their social influence has been increasingly eclipsed as the state legal apparatus is strengthened and NGOs have emerged as major social service providers.

3.2.2 Reform and orthodoxy in Bangladesh

Tension between orthodox and folk Islamic beliefs has existed in Bangladesh for nearly two centuries. Islam in Bangladesh had long coexisted alongside Hindu and folk spiritual systems, absorbing many of these beliefs and practices, such as those involving *zinn* or spirits. Today these syncretic beliefs are shared across religious groups particularly in rural areas. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of belief in *zinn* among all Muslim countries, with 84 percent claiming to believe in such spirits according to Pew's 2012 report on the world's Muslims[56]. Owing to many shared syncretic beliefs, the rituals around significant life events such as birth, marriage, and death were and still are much the same in rural Muslim, Hindu, and Christian communities.[57]

Mid-nineteenth century reformers attempted to rid Bengali Islam of animistic and Hindu rituals, which they saw as idolatry, or *shirk*. They claimed that practicing a 'pure' version of Islam would allow Bengali Muslims to better integrate into the universal *ummah* that would allow Muslims to more readily challenge Western hegemony and assert Islam as a relevant discourse in the modernizing world.[58] Under British rule in India, Islamic revival and reform movements, including the Faraizi, the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya, and the Ta'aiyuni movements, increasingly became popular sites of anti-colonial resistance and centers for calls for social and economic justice based on religious principles.[59]

Box 4. Nineteenth century Islamic reform movements

The Farazi, founded by Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur in 1818, was the first major Islamic reform movement in Bengal. Shariatullah advocated a return to a fundamentalist brand of Islam devoid of popular and well-established Hindu and

Sufi practices including worship of *pir* (Sufi saints), and *urs* celebrations, which commemorated the deaths of important *pir*. He was hostile towards British Colonial rule and advocated the establishment of a Muslim Caliph. Though very influential during his lifetime, the momentum flagged following his death in 1840.

The Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya movement was founded by Shah Sayyid Ahmad not long after the Farazi movement rose to prominence. The Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya also preached a return to the past purity of Islam, but more openly promoted armed struggled against the British and other non-Muslims. They were particularly hostile to the Hindu *zamindar* or feudal landlord class that were supported by the British colonial authorities, a stance which won them many supporters among the Islamic peasantry.
--------(End of Box)

Madrasa education became critical to the Islamic reform agenda as these movements required schools that could train local theologians and clerical leadership, known as ulama, who could propagate orthodox beliefs and practices. The Deobandi movement, founded in 1867 by a group of anti-colonial Islamic scholars, was critical in this regard. Named after the Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband in Deband, Uttar Pradesh, India, the Deobandi were instrumental to the standardization of orthodox madrasa education in South Asia, creating the scholastic model that would be the basis for many madrasas including Bangladesh's current Quomi system.[60] The movement's doctrinal foundation is the Hanafi *madhham,* or school of Sunni Islamic Law; it also draws inspiration from the eighteenth century Indian Islamic thinker and reformer Shah Waliullah Dehlvi.

The grassroots activism that Islamic reform groups pioneered left a strong legacy in the many contemporary Islamic movements in Bangladesh. In the case of the Deobandi, the movement itself remains highly influential, particularly in Islamic education.

The reformers championed the economic and political causes of the rural poor and successfully channeled frustration against the British and Hindu *zamindars*. Movements today seek to harness similar frustration around the rapid economic and social change that has altered social structures and left many in the orthodox Islamic community behind. The reformers also challenged western economic and political hegemony, asserting Islam as a viable path to modernity. Many orthodox Islamic actors in Bangladesh today continue to play such roles particularly *vis a vis* development institutions which many see as the successor to western colonial oppressors.[61]

The movements use many of the same tools that these reformers used to engage the public, which combined traditional approaches with modern innovations such as *bahas* or village-based debates on controversial religious topics, and *waz mahfil*

religious meetings aimed at encouraging proper praxis[62]. Islamic media written in the Bengali language was an innovation of nineteenth century reforms, including religious pamphlets known as *nasihat nama* and many new Islamic newspapers and periodicals. Communication tools such as *waz mahfils* and Islamic print media founded during the nineteenth century are still influential and widely employed today in addition to television and the internet. There has been very limited research into the nature and influence of Islamic media in contemporary Bangladesh but it is active and undoubtedly changing in the light of new technologies.

3.2.3 Orthodox Islam in Bangladesh today

There are several ideological heirs to the orthodox reform movements in modern Bangladesh. The most broad-based reform movement is Tabligh Ja'maat, which grew out of the Deobandi movement. It is a grassroots Islamic movement focused on *dawah* (preaching) meant to inspire personal spiritual development through *tabligh* (piety) and ultimately intended to renew and revive Islamic faith more broadly. Unlike past reform movements, which were largely ulama-led, the Tabligh Ja'maat is decentralized, with lay Muslims taking on much of the leadership. Tabligh Ja'maat encourages followers to regularly undertake *khuruj*, a type of proselytizing tour. Followers typically commit one night a week, one weekend a month, 40 continuous days a year, and 120 continuous days at least once in one's lifetime to *khuruj[63]*. These itinerate lay proselytizers often temporarily locate themselves at local mosques to hold a *chilla*, or Islamic teaching session. Research suggests that these sessions are growing in popularity, particularly in rural areas[64]. The annual meeting of the Tabligh Ja'maat in Bangladesh, the Bishwa Ijtema, is the largest Muslim congregation in the world outside of the Hajj, drawing more than five million faithful to the town of Tongi near Dhaka for prayer and other acts of devotion. Unlike many Islamic movements in Bangladesh, the Tabligh Ja'maat is politically neutral. The movement is seen as having significant influence on social attitudes, particularly on topics such as women's empowerment. Since its creation, women had been forbidden to join Tabligh Jamat due to their prescribed duties in the household as well as restrictions on travel without a male guardian. More recently, however, women have been permitted to join with male relatives as they go on *khuruj*.[65]

The Ahl-e-Hadith movement is another important force in orthodox Islam in Bangladesh. They do not follow a *madhham* or school of Islamic jurisprudence but instead interpret directly from the Hadith, a collection of Islamic scripture that documents the sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad. This approach contrasts the Deobandis and other orthodox groups with whom they have had disputes. It is a loosely-bound movement consisting of many organizations that vary in size and degree of formalization. Another movement, whose followers reject the authority of the hadiths and focus exclusively on the Qur'an, are known as Qur'anists. This movement is much smaller in size and influence.

Box 5. Islamic extremism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has long had a reputation as a moderate and tolerant Muslim country where radical interpretations of Islam have rarely found fertile ground. There have been periodic worries over the spread of militant ideology and international terror links within Bangladesh's orthodox communities, but these worries were, until recently, largely proved unfounded. Nonetheless, several groups emerged in the late 1990s and successfully carried out high profile terror attacks. The Bangladesh wing of Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami, known as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), which operates across South Asia, carried out a series of deadly grenade attacks over their years of operation. Two high profile incidents included an attack on the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh in May 2004 and another on August 21, 2004 on an Awami league rally in Dhaka, a failed attempt to assassinate Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina with 23 fatalities.

Perhaps the most significant terror organization to have operated in Bangladesh in the past decade is Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB), which focused its attacks on government offices, targeting courts and judges in particular. JMB has two distinct wings, one for *dawah* (preaching) focused on making a case for Sharia law in Bangladesh, and a militant wing, whose members are known as *ehsar*. JMB may have had as many as 2,000 *ehsar* at its height with a significant presence in nine regional divisions, but its stronghold was Rajshahi, in the northwest.[66] On August 17, 2005, JMB detonated over 500 small bombs in 63 out of the 64 districts in Bangladesh. Among the targets were government institutions and private hotels popular with the development community. The bombings killed two people and injured a further 50. The International Crisis Group reports that JMB has two main recruitment bases: the network of mosques and madrasas associated with the Ahl-e-Hadith movement and Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the youth wing of Jamaat-e-Islami. Though there have been suggestions that Islamic militant groups source funding through various Islamic charities such as the Society of the Revival of Islamic Heritage, most primarily rely on direct donations from supporters working in the Middle East.

The Bangladeshi government has been active in its pursuit of militant groups, arresting and executing many top leaders and jailing hundreds more. This extensive crackdown dealt a significant blow to what were already fairly marginal groups. Present estimates suggest JMB's ranks may only number 250.[67] While arms caches have been found periodically, the country has not seen a major terror attack in nearly a decade.

Political violence and communal unrest have been rising in Bangladesh and in this context religion has become a convenient conduit to channel anger and frustration experienced by many who feel voiceless in the country's faltering democracy. It is often suggested that radical religious rhetoric is significantly more likely to take hold where communities feel disempowered. If left unaddressed, the increasing numbers of economically marginalized Quomi madrasa graduates lead to a worry that militant Islam could find renewed support.

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3.2.4 Islam and politics in Bangladesh

Islamist political parties reemerged under the authoritarian regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad, though they were originally banned under Bangladesh's constitution and were often seen as aligned materially and ideologically with Pakistan. lslamist parties played a large part in the pro-democracy demonstrations that toppled Ershad's regime and reinstituted democracy in 1991. In Bangladesh's 1991 parliamentary elections, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) won 11 seats, which was just enough to allow the party to play kingmaker in a coalition with BNP. Jamaat's success bolstered the position of political Islam and thus began a massive proliferation in Islamic political parties, which by 2006 numbered more than a hundred.[68] The most prominent currently include Jamaat-e-Islami, as well as Jaker Party, Khelafot Andolon, Muslim League, Jomiote Ulamaye Islam Bangladesh, Islamic Front Bangladesh, and Islami Oikko Jot (IOJ). Most wield only local influence and none aside from Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikko Jot have ever won seats in parliament. By and large, Islamic political parties have seen little electoral success, but despite this fact, the political deadlock between the two major parties have allowed Islamists, in particular JI, to exert a political and social influence far beyond their base of popular support in society.

Box 6. Jamaat-e-Islami

Jamaat-e-Islami is an Islamic political party with wings in India, Pakistan, Kashmir, and Bangladesh, founded during the British colonial period by the Punjabi journalist and Islamic scholar Maulana Abul Ada Maududi (1903–1979). It is the largest Islamic political party in Bangladesh and its agenda includes the creation of an "Islamic state" and the implementation of sharia law through democratic means. Supporters of the party opposed Bangladesh's secession from Pakistan, and a number of its leaders are alleged to have participated in pro-Pakistan paramilitary activities during the Liberation War.

After the ban on religious political parties was lifted in 1978, Jamaat successfully won seats in parliamentary elections. They entered a ruling coalition with the BNP, with Jamaat leaders assuming high profile cabinet positions. In August 2013, Bangladesh's Supreme Court revoked Jammat-e-Islami's registration claiming that its charter, in placing God before state, conflicted with the country's constitution. The party remains banned from politics, but is extensively involved in a range of charitable and commercial endeavors including Islamic banking. Their youth wing is known as Islamic Chhatra Shibir and maintains an active presence in many universities.
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The ruling Awami League has sought to limit the influence of political Islam by attempting to restore the constitution to its original character, which includes a ban on political parties with a religious basis. Political Islam has been dealt a significant blow by the ongoing International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) which has prosecuted those accused of committing atrocities committed in support of the Pakistani Army and local paramilitary groups during Bangladesh's Liberation War.

3.2.5 The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) verdicts and the secular religious divide

The International Crimes Tribunal was established in 2009 to try those suspected of war crimes during Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War. These trials figure centrally in recent social unrest in Bangladesh since 2013. The ICT, initially supported by international partners, has come to be seen by some as a political tool to purge political rivals of the ruling Awami League, particularly Islamists. To date, ten leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami and two BNP leaders have been sentenced. The verdicts have elicited strong reactions (positive and negative) from both politically liberal and conservative groups in Bangladesh.

On February 5, 2013 Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah was sentenced to life in prison, convicted of five of six counts of crimes against humanity as a member of a pro-Pakistan militia group during the Liberation War. Demonstrations began almost immediately involving leftists and secularists who considered the sentence too lenient and called for the death penalty. These demonstrations drew considerable support from youth and women and became known as the 'Shahbag protests' for the area near the University of Dhaka where they were centered. Conservative and Islamist groups contended that the ICT was aimed primarily at settling political scores and staged counter protests in the wake of the death sentence for Delwar Hossain Sayeedi on February 28, 2013. Several of these demonstrations turned violent and roughly 60 people were killed in clashes with police[69].

The government responded to this unrest with a broad national crackdown on Islamist groups and other critics. Human Rights Watch has documented incidents of police brutality, extrajudicial killings, and unlawful arrests of opposition activists. Most of these activists were supporters of Islamist groups or were associated with the Shahbag movement. HRW estimates that 150 people were killed and 2,000 injured by government security forces between February and October of 2013.[70] Several secular bloggers critical of the government were also arrested during the 2013 unrest, as were editors of opposition newspapers and the head of Odhikar, a leading human rights group.

Table 4. International Crimes Tribunal indictments

Name	Party affiliation	Status
AKM Yusuf	JI	Indicted August 2013; died in prison February 2014
Ghulam Azam	JI	Sentenced to 90 years in prison June 2013; died in prison Oct. 2014
Matiur Rahman Nizami	JI	Sentenced to death in Jan. 2014 under separate charges; court delayed sentencing in June 2014 due to ill health; sentenced to death in war tribunal trial in October 2014
Delwar Hossain Sayeedi	JI	Sentenced to death in Feb. 2013; sentence commuted to life in prison in Sept. 2014
Ali Hasan Mohammad Mojahid	JI	Sentenced to death July 2013
Muhammaad Kamaruzzaman	JI	Sentenced to death May 2013 (sentence upheld by Bangladesh Supreme Court April 2015); executed April 2015
Abdul Quader Mollah	JI	Sentenced to life in prison February 2013; sentenced changed to death in September 2013 after amendment to ICT law; executed December 2013
Mir Kashem Ali	JI	Sentenced to death Nov 2014
Miah Golam Parwar	JI	Still held
Abul Kalam Azad (Bachchu)	JI	Sentenced to death January 2013 in absentia (fled the country)
Abdul Alim	BNP	Sentenced to life in prison October 2013; died in prison
Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury	BNP	Sentenced to death October 2013; appealed the verdict
Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin	(no party affiliation)	Sentenced to death November 2013 in absentia (lives in the UK)
Abdus Subhan	JI	Sentenced to death February 2015

During late 2014, the Awami League government took steps to avoid violence around the ICT by delaying verdicts and commuting some sentences despite pressure from their secular political base. However on September 17, 2014, Bangladesh's high court commuted the death sentence of Delwar Hossain Sayeedi to life imprisonment. Long delayed, a death sentence was handed down for Motiur

Rahman Nizami, another Jamaat leader in October 2014, and Mis Kashem Ali was also sentenced to death just a few days later. Police were deployed around the country in anticipation of the verdict, and although protests took place across the country, immediate violence was minimal.

However, in January 2015, new rounds of strikes led by the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami began in response to the one year anniversary of the elections. As of June 2015, the strikes and clashes between opposition supporters and the police continued. In February 2015, an arrest warrant was issued for Khaleda Zia, the head of the BNP, in connection with her trial on corruption charges. Human Rights Watch also called for an investigation into the disappearance of Salah Uddin Ahmed, joint secretary of the BNP, on March 10, 2015.[71]

Box 7. Blogger Attacks and Killings

Bangladesh has seen a spate of Islamist attacks and murders of atheist and secular-minded bloggers who were some of the Shahbag movement's strongest voices. On 15 February 2013, Ahmed Rajib Haider, one of the protests key organizers, was attacked and killed as he left his home in Dhaka. A month before the attack, blogger Asif Mohiuddin was attacked outside his own home and though seriously injured, survived. Sunnyur Rahman, a blogger and online activist popularly known as 'Nastik Nobi' or 'Atheist Prophet' was stabbed on 7 March 2013, but also survived his attack.

One of the most high profile killings came on 26 February 2015 when Bangladeshi-born American blogger, Avijit Roy and his wife were attacked with machetes as they left the Ekushey Book Fair on the campus of Dhaka University. Roy was killed and his wife was severely injured in the attack. Roy was the founder of the website Mukto-Mona (freethinkers) described as an "Internet congregation of freethinkers, rationalists, skeptics, atheists & humanists of mainly Bengali and South Asian descent" whose "mission is to promote science, rationalism, secularism, freethinking, human rights, religious tolerance, and harmony amongst all people in the globe".[72] On 30 March, Washiqur Rahman, who blogged using the pen name 'Kucchit Hasher Channa' or 'Ugly Duckling' was hacked to death by three men in Dhaka. The two assailants who were apprehended were both madrasa students.[73] Most recently, Ananta Bijoy Das, a contributor to Mukto-Mona and other blogs, was attacked and killed in Sylhet by four masked men with machetes on 12 May 2015.[74]

In the wake of the killing of Ahmed Rajib Haider, the government initially responded by cracking down on blogs they accused of defaming Islam, arresting four bloggers, Omi Rahman Pial, Ibrahim Khalil, Arif Jebtik and Asif Mohiuddin. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission shut down several blogs including Asif Mohiuddin's somewhereinblog.net. After considerable international outrage over the arrests and the continued targeting of prominent bloggers the government of Bangladesh has expressed more willingness to go after perpetrators and has made a

series of arrests. Many of those arrested in the attacks are associated with Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir as well as a new radical group known as Ansarullah Bangla Team.[75] All three of the bloggers most recently attacked were named on a 'hit list' of 84 writers suggested to have made derogatory statements about Islam which has been circulated among groups of radical Islamists, raising fears that others named in the list are in imminent danger of being targeted.[76]
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3.2.6 New Islamic groups in the post-Shahbag era

Several new Islamist groups have arisen in response to the Shahbag movement, with particular emphasis on ongoing societal changes including madrasa reform efforts and changing economic and social roles for women. The largest and most significant, Hefazat-e-Islam (Protectors of Islam), is an alliance of orthodox madrasa teachers and students centered in Bangladesh's Chittagong region. The group has issued a list of 13 wide-ranging demands (see box) that include a ban on the public mixing of sexes, prosecution of atheists, and imposition of the death penalty for blasphemy. The protesters organized a "long march" toward Dhaka beginning in Chittagong, Sylhet, and Rajshahi to demonstrate support for these 13 demands. The march ended in a massive demonstration in Dhaka on May 5, 2013 that became known as the "Dhaka Siege," coordinated with major protests in other cities around the country. Protesters vandalized vehicles and shops and clashed with the police, with at least 50 protesters killed. The violence spread to 20 districts in nearly every corner of the country.

Box 8. Hefazat-e-Islam's 13 demands:

1. Abolish all laws in conflict with the Qur'an and sunnah
2. Stop the anti-Islamic propaganda of the Shahbag movement and bloggers and punish them
3. Stop all repressive measures against Islamic leaders, schools, and madrasa students
4. Immediate and unconditional release of all Muslim leaders, theological students, and other Muslims who have been arrested, withdraw the cases against them, and provide compensation to the injured and dead
5. Remove all obstructions at Baitul Mokarram and other mosques that prevent people from performing salat (prayer), and stop the obstruction of those attending religious sermons and other religious gatherings
6. Declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslim by the government and end Ahmadi "propaganda"
7. Enactment of an anti-defamation law in parliament that would prescribe the death penalty as the highest punishment for those who defame Allah, Muhammad, and Islam
8. End "foreign" social practices like the mixing of men and women in public, immodesty, lewdness, misconduct, and candle lighting in the name of freedom of speech and other personal freedoms
9. Stop erecting statues at road intersections and universities in Dhaka
10. Make Islamic education compulsory at all school levels and the anti-Islamic inheritance and women's laws
11. Stop all threats against religious students, teachers, and imams of the Quomi madrasas

12. Stop the spread of Islamophobia to youth through the negative depiction of Muslim characters on TV and other media, including negative stereotypes around the beard, cap, and other Islamic practices in the media
13. Stop all activities of anti-Islamic NGOs and Christian missionaries and religious conversions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and throughout the country

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Movements such as Hefazat have been bolstered by graduates of Quomi madrasas frustrated by perceived discrimination. Quomi madrasa diplomas are not recognized by the government due to their strictly religious curriculum, leaving many graduates with limited job prospects. The lack of transparency regarding the curriculum of many Quomi institutions has also led some to suggest that these institutions are contributing to the radicalization of students, although recent evidence on this point has been mixed.

Box 9. Rohingya in Bangladesh

The Rohingya are a Sunni Muslim ethnic group residing primarily in the Myanmar's Rakhine State. They have been suggested to be among the world's most persecuted minorities. The Rohingya community was thrust into the international spotlight following the 2012 Rakhine State riots in which 88 people were killed, 2,528 homes were burned and roughly 90,000 Rohingya were displaced. A main instigator of recent anti-Muslim violence has been a new Buddhist nationalist group known as the '969 Movement,' though persecution of Rohingya has a substantial history. The Burmese government has long viewed the Rohingya as Bengali migrants and has denied them citizenship under the 1982 Burmese Nationality Law. As a consequence, the roughly 1 million Rohingya in Myanmar are now legally stateless.

Particularly since the 2012 riots Rohingya have looked to flee Myanmar and have become increasingly common victims of human trafficking. The recent discovery of mass graves in Thailand and Malaysia has begun to expose the extent of this crisis. The UN estimates that 100,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar by boat via the Malacca Strait and the Andaman Sea.[77] Recently this has been an issue of international concern, as neighboring countries in Southeast Asian are unwilling to receive Rohingya refugees. As of May 2015, the International Organization for Migration believed there were 8,000 Rohingya stranded at sea[78].

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that over 32,000 refugees live in official camps in Bangladesh where they receive aid from humanitarian groups such as UNHCR, Islamic Relief USA, the World Food Programme (WFP), and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). There are estimates that an additional 200,000 unregistered Rohingya refugees live in informal settlements in and around Cox's Bazaar with no legal protection or humanitarian assistance.

The government of Bangladesh has not had a strong history of supporting Rohingya refugees because of concerns that the population could swell. It has recently proposed a controversial plan to relocate Rohingya refugee camps to the undeveloped island of Thengar Char, which has no infrastructure nor, most critically, flood defenses given the several feet of water that cover the island at high tide.[79] The government has cited disruption of coastal tourism as its reason for the relocation of the camps.

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Box 10. Bangladesh's Ahmadiyya Community

Hefazat's demand for the Ahmadiyya to be declared "non-Muslims" brings renewed attention to this religious minority that has faced significant persecution in Bangladesh. The Ahmadiyya community is a religious group founded in 1889 in India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who claimed to be the promised Imam Mahdi whose return was foretold by the prophet Muhammad. In part due to their unorthodox beliefs and the fact that Ahmadiyya are active proselytizers, they are considered *kafirs* or infidels by many conservative Islamist groups. There are more than 100 Ahamdi mosques in Bangladesh with devotees numbering in the tens of thousands. Ahmadis have faced significant persecution in Bangladesh with some of the worst attacks in the mid-2000s. On October 29, 2004, a mob of at least 300 Islamists attacked an Ahmadi mosque in Brahmanbaria district, destroying property and attacking worshippers with axes, seriously injuring 11 people. Similarly, on April 17, 2005 in an attack on an Ahmahdi mosque in Joydrianagar district, a mob injured at least 25 people. In response to anti-Ahmadi protests in 2004, the BNP-Jamaat coalition government placed restrictions on the activities of Ahmadiyya groups and banned all Ahmadiyya publications. Though many of these rights have since been restored, the persecution of Ahmadis continues and can escalate during times of political instability.

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3.2.7 Sufis and syncretic Islam in Bangladesh

The intense media attention paid to orthodox and political Islamist groups in Bangladesh gives the false impression that these ideologies are far more influential than they truly are among the nation's 140 million Muslims. Diversity is in reality an important character of Bangladeshi Islam, particularly in many rural parts of the country where Hindu and other indigenous spiritual practices are often melded into the localized Islamic traditions. Hardline groups have struggled to find support among average Bangladeshis, with whom the legalistic preoccupation of their message often fails to resonate. Sufi traditions, in contrast, have had such enduring popularity in Bangladesh over the past several centuries, particularly amongst rural Muslims, that many view Sufism as the religion of the people.

Probably more than half of all Muslims in Bangladesh follow heterodox folk traditions[80] usually centered on a local Sufi *mazar*, or tomb-shrine of a renowned Sufi saint (*pirs*). Sufi *pirs* were among the first to spread the Islamic religion in Bengal, and their charismatic strategies often involved absorbing and incorporating aspects of the indigenous spiritual traditions they encountered. Long-derided by religious modernizers as backwards, corrupted, and superstitious, Sufis found new champions among urban intellectuals in post-independence Bangladesh who were seeking liberal interpretations of Islam that could revive its rich spiritual and artistic heart in the face of the violent misappropriation of the tradition they witnessed during the Pakistan period.

Sufism is often defined as the mystical inner dimension of Islam. Despite their diversity, Sufi orders, or *tariqa,* share a number of core beliefs, which have been articulated over the centuries by classical Sufi thinkers. Most fundamentally Sufis emphasize love of rather than fear of God and privilege a direct and vivid personal relationship with the divine. Sufis seek to purify themselves through their deeds, as well as rituals, in pursuit of ultimate truth, which can often involve music and dance. For Sufis, these rituals offer an opportunity to draw close to God in life. The Sufi approach can sometimes stand in significant contrast to the strictly doctrinal path to purity dictated by the sharia and sunnah. Sufis also seek to recognize the presence of the divine in themselves, others, and the wider world, which some suggest serves as inspiration for the social welfare work of Sufi groups.[81]

Sufi worship can center on any of the hundreds of *mazar* scattered across Bangladesh, which despite their immense social importance have never seen a full accounting. *Mazar* are not only a place of worship for Muslims, but also attract Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians in considerable numbers. As a result, these unique institutions have long served as bastions of interreligious exchange, dialogue, and community building. *Mazar* are places where people come to seek help in their studies, career, or personal life, and their importance cuts across Bangladeshi society. *Mazar* also serve as places of refuge for the destitute, mentally ill, unwed pregnant women, and other marginalized groups. Indicative of just how broadly influential *mazar* culture is, most Bangladeshi politicians choose to launch their campaigns from the *mazar* of Shah Jalal, a widely-revered 13th century *pir*. In contrast to the gender segregation in many Islamic contexts, women and men mix freely at *mazar* and though gender norms vary widely across Sufi communities globally, women often take on meaningful leadership positions within Sufi congregations in Bangladesh.

Sufi voices often do not feature centrally in national discussions of religion despite the great relevance of *mazar* culture to the lives of ordinary Bangladeshis. Due to divisions between Sufi orders and ego clashes among leaders, Sufis have not been able to act as a unified social force that could bring Sufi ideals and values effectively into public discourse. Furthermore, despite the immense scholarly and artistic

achievements of historical Sufis, the intellectual influence of Sufi thought in Bangladeshi madrasas is virtually nonexistent. The lowly position of Sufi scholarship is due partially to the fact that the British privileged the orthodox *dars-i-nizami* curriculum in state-run madrasas during the colonial era, which they found more compatible with their project of modernization compared to Sufi mysticism.[82]

Sufi groups are only now beginning to rebuild their capacity to produce new scholarship and pursue other intellectual ventures. Those Sufis that are working to influence national dialogue on religion have approached this task with considerable caution. This is prudent as *mazar* have been recent targets of bombings in Bangladesh and across South Asia because of the threat these localized expressions are seen to pose to the universal community of Islam that looks to Mecca and not *mazars* for direction. Despite the risks, several Sufi groups have been working towards rebuilding Sufi capacity in scholarship, building solidarity between *turuq* (Sufi orders), and involving Sufis more closely in social welfare in their communities.

There have been some efforts at a national conversation on Sufi ideals and values. The Maizbhandari, one of South Asia's largest *tariqa,* has inaugurated an International Sufi Conference, now in its fourth year, which offers a promising start as a platform for Sufi exchange on a national stage. The small but active Haqqani Mission is dedicated to rebuilding the Sufi intellectual tradition in Bangladesh, hosting discussion sessions and publishing Sufi writings, with plans to support a university-level Sufi theology program. Many Sufi orders are dedicated to volunteerism and engage in social welfare activities with varying levels of formality, but their potential impact is great. Indeed *mazars*, particularly those associated with the most popular Sufi *tariqa*, can generate large sums of money, and not surprisingly they have often been criticized for their lack of transparency. In response, the Maizbhadaris have been in the process of registering their *tariqa* as a trust and dedicating a significant portion to their social welfare work and fledgling madrasa system. If it is successful, they could serve as a model for other Sufi groups.

Sufi figures, ideals, and institutions have been integral to the construction of shared cultural values in Bangladesh, and Sufi *mazar* remain deeply important in the lives of millions of Bangladeshis of all faiths. As the development community looks to support Bangladesh in building an open, tolerant, and peaceful society in the face of increasingly divisive rhetoric around religion, the growing if understated efforts of Sufis warrant attention, consideration, and engagement.

3.2.8 The mosque

Leadership in Islamic communities in Bangladesh remains, broadly, highly decentralized, and the local mosque is the most central religious and community institution for most Bangladeshis. Despite the Islamic movements described above and some high profile national Muslim leaders, as elsewhere in the Sunni world, there is no ordained clergy or established Muslim religious hierarchy. A group of Islamic legal scholars known as ulama fulfills the role of religious clerics and are often viewed as important community leaders. Ulama are differentiated by level of religious training, e.g. Mawlānā, Imam, and Mufti. Ulama in Bangladesh are exclusively men; however, a growing number of Qur'an reading groups among middle and lower class urban women reflect the growing confidence of women in the society, including in religious institutions. In practice, it is the local mosque that is the focal institution of Islam in Bangladesh. The Ministry of Religious Affairs counts over 250,000 mosques in Bangladesh today.[83]

An imam leads prayers five times daily in the mosque and a muezzin gives the *azan* (call to prayer) and assists the imam in his daily duties. In some rural and impoverished mosques the roles may be combined. Every mosque is overseen by a mosque committee, which handles maintenance, development, and other strategic aims of the mosque. These committees are typically composed of influential community members, and, particularly in rural areas, these are positions of power and prestige. The committee also manages the mosque's finances, paying the imam and muezzin and soliciting donations from local patrons or from the Bangladeshi diaspora community abroad. Finances and plans are typically discussed with the community in annual meetings.[84]

A 2012 report on the world's Muslims reports that 53 percent of Bangladeshis attend mosque at least once a week with 35 percent attending multiple days a week.[85] These figures are, however, heavily skewed by gender. While only two percent of men stated that they never attended mosque, the figure was 77 percent among women, one of the highest gender disparities in the Muslim world.[86] Traditionally women have not been permitted into Bangladeshi mosques and those mosques that do have been few in number and are typically found in wealthier and more socially liberal neighborhoods in Dhaka. For many women their spiritual practice is centered in the home or at Sufi *mazar* which have not placed the same restrictions on access to women.

For those that attend mosque weekly, it is typically for *jum'ah* prayer, the most important prayer of the week, which is held mid-day on Fridays. Particularly during *jum'ah*, the mosque serves as an important center for social exchange and community building for the jamaat or congregation, though as mentioned this community space is male dominated. The *jum'ah* prayers are also important forums for the transmission of Islamic ideals and values, and in some cases, perspectives on

social and political issues. Before the prayer, the imam will deliver the *khutba* or sermon, which is intended to provide practical advice and guidance for those in attendance. The *khutba* is often delivered in Arabic, a language often not understood by the majority of the congregation. However, in some cases these will be delivered entirely in, or followed by, commentary in the Bengali language.[87]

The mosque has traditionally been the anchor of Bangladeshi civil society, particularly in rural areas.[88] Each village established at least one society or *samaj* composed of respected elders known as *matbars*, who were responsible for resolving community problems at a village tribunal known as a *shalish*. *Samaj* are typically organized around a mosque and *matbars* typically developed their public reputation by serving on mosque committees. Given the political turmoil in Bangladesh during much of the twentieth century and current political instability, *samaj* have often been seen as more established and enduring than the state. The *samaj* had strong roles in providing services that were taken on by the state and NGOs in later years, for example, disaster management (for flood mitigation), feeding the poor, and constructing infrastructure such as bridges and schools.[89]

3.2.9 Islam, development, and the empowerment of women in rural Bangladesh

The explosion of NGOs in the years after independence, and their growing influence in local communities, has created tension with Islamic actors who had long constituted traditional 'civil society' in Bangladesh. This is seen most starkly in the ideological divergence between Bangladesh's development and religious communities on the issue of women's empowerment. The differing perspectives ultimately encompass two different visions of modernity in Bangladesh. The development community increasingly viewed women as agents of positive change in their families, communities, and in society more broadly, a role which clashed with traditional religious understandings of women's social duties to the home and family.

NGOs in Bangladesh have made women's empowerment a priority, with many placing women at the center of approaches to eliminate poverty. Impoverished rural women were targeted in economic empowerment programs through microcredit, livelihood development, and advocacy efforts to improve local healthcare and education. A result is changes in women's mobility, prestige in their local community, and expansion of roles in household decision-making, which challenge traditional social norms and moral order.[90] In response to these challenges, local imams began declaring NGOs "enemies of Islam," accusing them of converting local people to Christianity and bringing shame to women. Beginning in 1993, several large and influential NGOs including BRAC, Proshika, and Grameen Bank and their female beneficiaries, were targeted with acts of physical violence.

Islamic leaders proclaimed the development agenda promoted by national NGOs including BRAC, Proshika, and Grameen was 'Christian'. In this context 'Christian' was used as a recognizable and emotive proxy for 'Western' among the largely uneducated rural population. The conflation of development with Christianity by local Islamic leaders suggested that they viewed the development agenda as representing a targeted attack on traditional Islamic values and ideals. Interestingly, despite the common claim that many secular NGOs were focused on converting local people to Christianity, explicitly Christian organizations such as Caritas and Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh were rarely the victims of attack.[91] Leaders at these organizations have suggested that their organizations avoided attack as a direct result of their grassroots approach, engagement of local leaders, and their positive reputation in communities

Throughout the 1990s, protesters targeted NGOs that provided services including primary education, micro-credit, health and family planning across rural Bangladesh. Imams and madrasa teachers called for parents to withdraw their children from NGO run schools and between January and March 1994 alone, more than 100 NGO-run schools were set ablaze and teachers assaulted.[92] These attacks were often justified through *fatwa* or Islamic legal opinion or interpretation, which are issued by ulama in response to a question posed by a private citizen. Between 1992 and 2002 there were more than 240 documented cases of *fatwa* being issued against women in rural Bangladesh[93]. In most cases these involved a violation of *purdah* (see box) by women's participation in NGO groups that required them to interact with non-kin males and neglect their domestic duties. The Bangladeshi government declared *fatwa* illegal in 2001, but this did not completely eliminate their issuance in rural Bangladesh.[94]

Box 11. *Purdah*

Purdah refers to female seclusion that is prevalent in many Muslim contexts in South Asia. Although the practice is mostly associated today with Islam, many scholars argue that *purdah* has pre-Islamic roots and continues in some Hindu communities. The practice of *purdah* can take two forms: the physical segregation of women in the home, and the covering of women to conceal their skin from the gaze of non-kin men. *Purdah* has been denounced by many within Western and Muslim contexts as a patriarchal practice that severely limits women's economic and social freedom by controlling mobility. However, in some contexts, including Bangladesh, the burqa is growing in popularity among middle and upper class women and is seen as a marker of Islamic modernity. Women may view the burqa as a tool that allows women to access education and economic opportunities while maintaining modesty and honor.[95] Some suggest that the trend primarily harms lower class women who are often forced to compromise their modesty in order to survive, since they are often required to perform work that cannot be performed in a burqa.
------(end of box)

In recent years NGOs have not seen the same level of violent resistance to their programming, but an ideological rift still exists. In many ways, the opposition of Islamic groups to predominant development paradigms can and should be viewed in the context of the historical resistance to Western hegemony by orthodox Islamic reformers in the region. Orthodox Islamic groups in Bangladesh largely oppose what they see as an NGO-imposed western social order, with a focus on individualism, equality, and the primacy of the market, which conflicts with 'Islamic' values of community, hierarchy, and subsistence[96]. The issue of women's rights was an area where the opinions of men from various social strata converged, and many viewed the notion of bringing women more forcefully into the public sphere as economic and political decision makers to be a Western imposition.[97]

Islamic actors were not only motivated by the perceived threat to Islamic values and traditional social norms but also the fear that NGOs would undermine the political influence and material benefits that they enjoyed in rural Bangladesh. Indeed the work of NGOs represented a significant challenge to traditional village power structures, such as the *samaj*, which were religious and patriarchal in nature. Many of the community groups formed by NGOs, and the "women's only groups" in particular, were seen as parallel structures to the *samaj* and in most cases received better funding and support.

Large numbers of women in Bangladesh are compelled to seek income outside of the home as a result of the new economic realities of modernizing Bangladesh. This is in large part based on the opportunity for women to work in the booming export-oriented garments sector. It is estimated that women account for between 80 and 90 percent of the garment workforce, a number that has grown from mere thousands in the early 1980s to over 1.8 million by 2000.[98]

In light of these new social and economic realities, Bangladeshi Islamic actors have sought ways to make Islam relevant in the development context. Over the past two decades countless Islamic NGOs and mosque-based CSOs have been created in an effort to reassert their influence in Bangladesh's increasingly crowded civil society. Some estimates put the number of religiously affiliated groups at over 200,000.[99] While the work of some of the larger Islamic organizations is documented, no real mapping of the grassroots Islamic CSOs has taken place and very little is known about the character, approach, and activities of these organizations. Many operate from a secular social welfare center perspective, while others pursue visions of Bangladesh as a modern Islamic state.

3.3 Hinduism in Bangladesh

Figure 6. Hindu percent of population by region
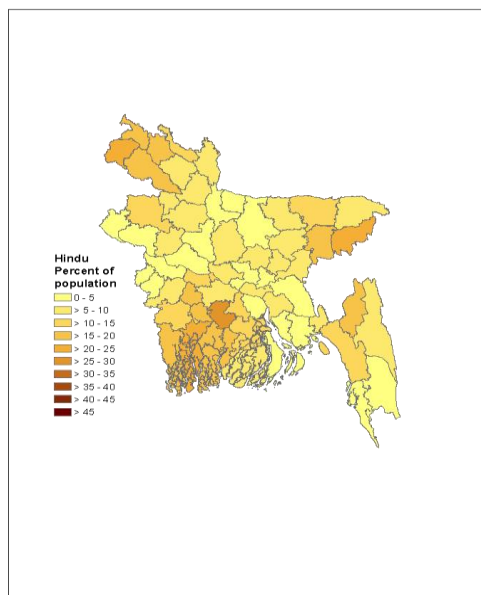
The diverse Indic religious traditions often now grouped under the rubric of Hinduism have been practiced in Bengal for millennia, reaching their zenith, it is thought, under the royal patronage of orthodox Hindu Sena and Deva dynasties in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Despite large-scale conversion to Islam in eastern Bengal under Mughal rule, a large and influential Hindu population remained and Hindus were the primary land-owning class in the feudal *zamindar* system, which was patronized by the British in the colonial period. During this era, Hindus owned some 85 percent of buildings and property in and around urban centers.[100] This historical wealth gap between Bengali Hindus and Muslims has more recently been invoked to generate resentment and distrust against the Hindu minority.[101]

Hindu communities are present in every division in Bangladesh, with the highest concentrations in Chittagong, Khulna, Jessore, Dinajpur, Faridpur, and Barisal (see figure 6). Contemporary Hinduism in Bangladesh is highly heterogeneous and localized. The Goddess Devi, the divine mother, in her form of Durga or Kali, is the most widely venerated deity in Bangladesh's Hindu community. Durga Puja is a six-day long annual festival dedicated to the worship of Durga and is the most important Hindu festival in Bangladesh celebrated by broad swaths of the population, not only Hindus. While worship of Devi as the Divine Mother (Shaktism) is the most widespread, Shiva worship (Shaivism) is prevalent among higher caste Hindus. The veneration of Vishnu (Vaishnavism), often in the form of Rama or Krishna, is also common and cuts more readily across caste lines.

Hindu worship can take place at the home, local shrines, spiritual hermitages known as *ashram*, temples known as *mandir*, and numerous pilgrimage sites. There are tens of thousands of significant Hindu sites across Bangladesh, often overseen by male Hindu ascetics such as sadhus or swamis. Many of the natural pilgrimage sites are known as *tirthas* and are considered places of concentrated spiritual power commonly associated with an important body of water. Bangladesh has several Shakti Peethas, sites where, according to Hindu religious texts, various parts of the goddess Shakti's body fell after her death. Bangladesh is also home to the birth sites of venerated Hindu saints including Swami Pranavananda Maharaj (1896–1941). A spiritual leader and Hindu revivalist, he founded the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, an international religious and philanthropic society focused on education, emergency relief, and social welfare. Many of Bangladesh's important Hindu pilgrim sites draw pilgrims from around the world.

Considerable syncretism developed between local Hindu and Sufi traditions in Bangladesh over the centuries, so that broad similarities can be seen between the two traditions today.[102] Both often rely on a guru-disciple relationship to transmit esoteric knowledge and have a philosophical preoccupation with the fundamental oneness of humanity. It remains common, particularly in rural areas, for Hindus to worship at *mazar* or shrines to Sufi saints known as *pirs*.

3.3.1 Hindu Reform and Revival

The reform and revival of Hindu religious traditions in nineteenth century India was interwoven with important social reforms of the period, particularly those advocating increased rights for women, and the rise of Indian nationalism. Many of the most important figures in Hindu reform and revival and the movements they founded were based in the Bengal region. This legacy is important in Bangladesh today as it has shaped the dominant practices and beliefs of Bangladeshi Hindus. Further, social welfare activities are still carried out by Hindu organizations founded in this period. This is well documented in Priti Kumar Mitra's overview of Hindu reform movements[103].

The Bramo Society and Social Reform

A key impetus for reform in Hindu religious communities was the challenge posed by Christian missionaries who publicly challenged what they viewed as superstitious, irrational, and socially atavistic elements of Hindu tradition. Protestants, in particular, were becoming increasingly active in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century. As a response to this challenge and in order to bring Hindus together under a non-sectarian umbrella, one of the earliest and most important figures in Hindu reform, Rammohan Roy, advanced a radically new monotheistic Hinduism with Brama as the supreme god. It rejected the *puranas*,

which detail the exploits of many of the deities, heroes, and sages in the Hindu pantheon in favor of the more metaphysical Vedanta. It aligned itself with scientific rationality and sought to bring Hinduism in line with post-enlightenment thought.

In 1828 Rammohan Roy founded the Bramo Society, a religious and social organization that attracted some of the great intellectual and religious luminaries at the time.

Rammohan Roy was a social and political reformer and a strong voice for women's empowerment, working most notably to end the practice of *sati*, a tradition in which a widow was compelled to burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Under Rammohan Roy's successor, Keshad Chandra Sen, the Bramo Society's social reform agenda was expanded significantly; the organization campaigned to abolish the caste system and to democratize Hinduism by ending the Brahmin's hegemony over religious rites. They were instrumental in the formulation of the Civil Marriage Act, advocating strongly for the right of widows to remarry and to end polygamy and child marriage. In support of women's expanded rights, they sought to end *purdah* or the physical seclusion of women, and pushed the colonial administration to allow women the right to inheritance. They founded schools that expanded female education significantly, which had been virtually nonexistent before. The movement waned in the early 20th century, but remained a social force. As Partition and the Liberation War forced many wealthier and educated Hindus to India the number of Bramos continued to decline. Today here are roughly 300 Bramos in Bangladesh; they remain progressive in orientation particularly regarding the religious roles of women who can act as *acharya* or priests. Despite the organization's small size many historical Bramos remain national heroes, seen as the laying the foundation for ongoing social reform movements.

Neo-Hinduism: Conservation, Revival, and Social Service

The Neo-Hindu movement also arose in the mid-nineteenth century, and was closely tied to burgeoning nationalist sentiments in the era. The diverse figures associated with the movement sought to revive Hinduism from its denigrated position and reassert it as the mother culture of India. In contrast to the Vedantic focus of the Bramo movement, the Neo-Hindus privileged the *puranas*, a collection of stories detailing the deeds of various deities. Many of the leading Neo Hindu figures opposed the sweeping social reform programs associated with the Bramo movement. They worried that drastic social reform without independence would result in social assimilation with the British and a loss of Hindu society that would make independence impossible. The movement also sought to bolster unity of the Hindus, amongst whom there was a great diversity in ritual and worship, by focusing on unifying beliefs, which were distilled as unity of humanity, divinity of man, and the cyclical nature of the universe. Neo-Hindus recognized the need for social reform; however, they also saw the necessity of ensuring that it was a cautious and thoughtful process, one based in study of Hindu scripture. Formulating general

preconditions for reform, a leading neo-Hindu figure, Bhudeb Mukherji, stated that it must follow the way of renunciation rather than worldly pleasure and should be aimed at the conservation of Hindu society. It must, he argued, be supported by a range of Hindu social leaders, and should be formulated in concert with traditional *pundits* (Hindu scholars).

One of the leading gurus of the Neo-Hindu movement century, Sri Ramakrishna, was born Gadadhar Chatterji into a poor Brahmin family in rural Bengal. He developed a universalist practice as chief priest at Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Speaking in colloquial Bengali and only semi-literate, Ramakrishna represented for many an uncorrupted figure who could transcend ongoing sectarian divisions and return Hindus to the pure spiritual core of the ancestral Hindu tradition. Ramakrishna's successor, Swami Vivekananda, was one of the first Hindu swamis to become well-known in the West, representing Hinduism at the first major international gathering of religious leaders, the 1893 "Parliament of Religions" in Chicago. Disseminating Ramakrishna's messages of spiritual unity, Vivekanada is seen as one of the early leaders of the interfaith movement.

Vivekananda, a former Bramo, continued Ramakrishna's focus on inner spiritual dimensions and moved away from external concerns, such as social reform that was central to the Bramo project. Instead, with the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897, the Neo-Hindu movement began to focus more on social service than social reform. Focusing primarily on health and education, these social service organizations privileged character-building and the inner spiritual development of students. Education was similarly the focus of another leading Neo-Hindu figure, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who opened schools across Bengal, with many directed at increasing educational opportunities for women. He was responsible for opening nearly 200 schools for women across rural Bengal.

The Neo-Hindus eventually eclipsed the Bramos and other Hindu reformers in size and influence and these interpretations are most influential in the region today. Under the Neo-Hindus this period saw a growth in popularity of the veneration of Durga who widely became seen as 'Mother Bengal'. This highlights a growing Hindu nationalist sentiment and a recognition of Hinduism as 'mother culture'. Durga remains the most important deity among Bangladesh's Hindus.

3.3.2 Persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh

Before the Partition of India in 1947, Hindus constituted nearly a third of the total population in what is now Bangladesh. Since partition, the population steadily declined due to regular out-migration to India (see figure 7). The migration is in part due to India's economic and social pull, but most Bangladeshi Hindus have felt pushed out of Bangladesh as well. Since partition, which divided India along religious lines, the Hindu community in Bangladesh was often perceived to be agents

of India. This suspicion has led to persecution, particularly in periods of turmoil. During the Liberation War Hindus in Bangladesh were targeted by the Pakistani Army and its sympathizers. More recently, Hindus are have been targeted in election-related violence.

Figure 7. Hindu percentage of population
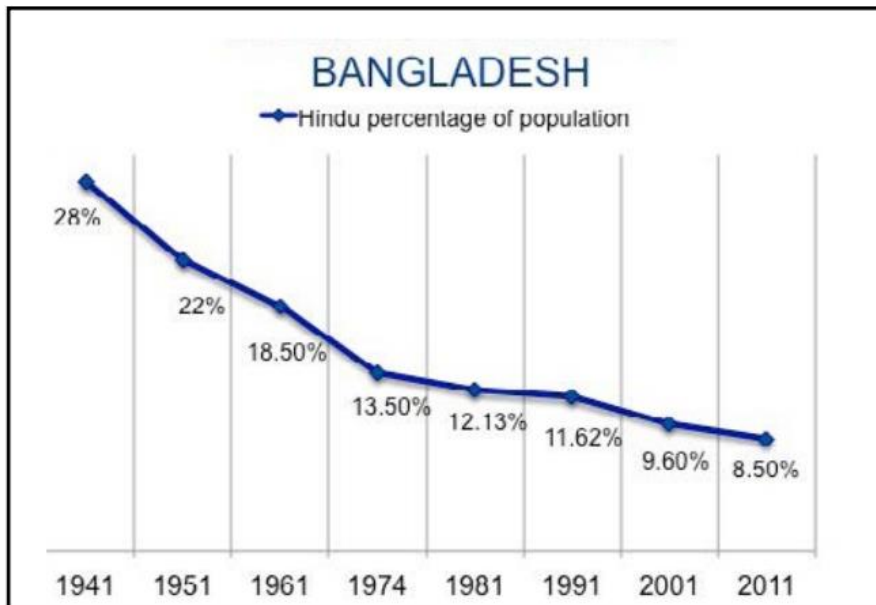
The targeting of minorities in elections violence has been motivated by a desire to limit their electoral influence. Hindus are commonly viewed by conservative political elements as a reliable voting bloc for the secular-leaning Awami League. While their population has dwindled, Hindus still form a majority of the electorate in at least two parliamentary constituencies and account for more than 25 percent in a further 20.[104] Hindus are often viewed as the deciding factor in very close parliamentary races. As in prior elections, in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2014 elections, Hindus and other religious minorities perceived to be supporters for the ruling Awami League became the target of political frustration. Hundreds of homes and shops owned by Bangladesh's minority Hindu community were vandalized. Attacks took place across the country and estimates suggest that up to 5,000 families were affected by the violence.[105]

Despite these periods of persecution, Bengali Hindu communities still retain vibrant traditions and are an influential cultural force in Bangladesh. While many important sites of Hindu worship, including the Ramna Kali Mandir, were razed by the Pakistani military during the 1971 Liberation War, other sites have emerged as community focal points. Dhaka's Dhakeshwari Temple has assumed the role as the de facto center of Hindu culture in Bangladesh, hosting the annual festivals of Durga Puja and Krishna Janmaashtami. The temple is state-owned and has the status of a national temple.

In part due to caste divisions and the decentralized nature of the Hindu faith, Bangladesh's Hindus lack the unity seen in other minority faith communities. Persecution in recent years, however, has strengthened solidarity. Community organizations, which were created to plan and manage Puja celebrations, have taken on new advocacy roles and are now focal institutions in the Hindu community. The two largest and most influential are Dhaka-based: the Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee and the Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad (BPUP). Many more are active across the country.

3.4 Buddhism in Bangladesh

The historical region of Bengal features prominently in the history of the Buddhist faith, recognized as the final foothold of Indian Buddhism after its disappearance from the remainder of the subcontinent. Buddhism was established in Bengal by the time of the great Buddhist king Ashoka, roughly two centuries before the Common Era. In the ensuing centuries Buddhism was alternately championed and repressed by rulers in the region, depending on their religious leanings. With the rise of the Pala dynasty in the eighth century, Buddhism in Bengal entered its "golden era", during which many of the region's most renowned temples and monasteries were built.[106] The Pala kingdom became one of the most important centers of Buddhist learning globally. Widely traveled Bengali Buddhist teachers such as Atisha Dipankara contributed to the revival and spread of Buddhism in Tibet and Southeast Asia. Bengal is said to be the birthplace of Tantric (Vajrayana) Buddhism, which emphasizes mystical and esoteric practices and privileges the guru-disciple relationship as a means of sacred knowledge transmission. Tantric Buddhist writings of the Pala era were among the first major works of Bengal's rich literary heritage.

Figure 8. Buddhist percent of population
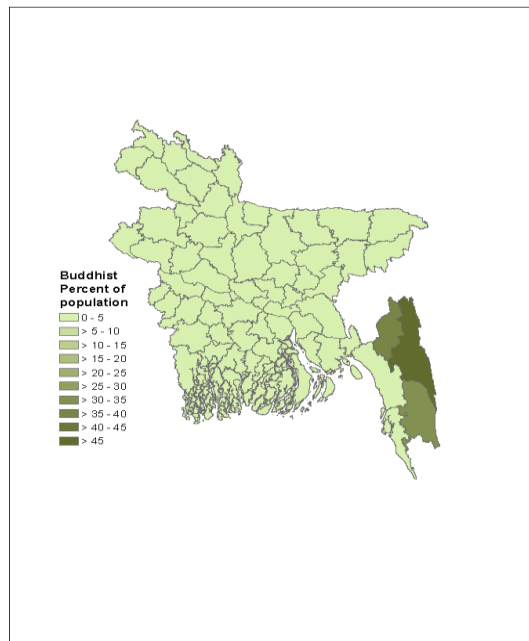
Buddhism was largely extinguished in Bengal after the advent of Muslim rule. Turkic General Bakhtiyar Khilji famously burned Nalanda University, one the most important historical centers of Buddhist learning of the era, in what is now Bangladesh, to the ground in 1200 CE. However, Buddhism survived among Barua communities in Chittagong, as well as among some highland indigenous communities (known locally as *adivasi*) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), notably the Chakma, the Marma, and the Tangchangya.

The current Buddhist population, around 0.5 percent of Bangladesh's total population or roughly 750,000 individuals, is concentrated in the Chittagong region. Buddhist temples are focal points of the Buddhist community, hosting not only religious practice but a range of social and community services. There are an estimated 1290 Buddhist temples in Bangladesh today.[107]

3.4.1 The introduction of Theravada Buddhism

Buddhism as it is practiced today in Chittagong grew out of a reform movement in the mid-19th century, which introduced Theravada orthodoxy via neighboring Burma. Theravada Buddhism, sometimes translated as the 'doctrine of the elders,' is an early school of Buddhism that relies primarily on the Tipitaka, the earliest surviving Buddhist writings. It has for centuries been the dominant form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. In an attempt to reform what were perceived as degenerate practices and a general laxity with regard to the *vinaya*, or rules of monastic discipline, a leading monk of the era, Radha Charan Mahastabir, invited the Arkanese monk Saramitra Mahastabir to

Chittagong to oversee the reforms and reordination of monks. The modern Bangladeshi *sangha* was born out of these reforms, as was the fraternal order Sangharaj Nikaya with Saramitra Mhastabir at its head.

A group of monks, objecting to the Burmese foreign influence within this new order, founded a rival order known as Mahasthabir Nikaya. These two fraternal orders or *nikaya*, Sangharaj Nikaya, and Mahasthabir Nikaya respectively, remain the formal divisions in the Barua Buddhist Sangha today, with each led by its own Sangharaj. It is suggested that there is little difference between the two orders doctrinally or in terms of discipline or monastic practice.[108] The indigenous Buddhist communities follow three further *nikaya*: Sudhamma Nikaya and Dohara Nikaya among the Marma, and the Parbatya Boudha Bhikkhu Sangha among the Chakma.

Buddhism in Bangladesh is not as strongly hierarchical as in other Theravada countries, and because of its unique history, *nikaya* divisions are not very pronounced. Perhaps the starkest division among Bangladeshi Buddhists is a cultural one, between lowland Bengali-speaking Barua and highland indigenous Buddhist communities.

Indigenous Buddhist monks are often preoccupied by the unique struggles of their own communities following the decade-long insurgency waged by the military wing of Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS), which sought autonomy for the CHT region. Through a peace accord signed in 1997, the region remains under tight military control and many grievances remain unaddressed. Controversial programs that encouraged the migration of Bengali Muslims into the Hill Tracts region were sponsored by the military regimes of General Zia and General Ershad, and recent years have seen a massive influx of settlers into the region. The result has been ongoing violent land disputes. Indigenous communities are now the minority in each of the three districts in the CHT region. Land rights and indigenous self-determination are salient issues for indigenous Buddhist monks who have been socially active in support of indigenous rights.

Box 12. Land tenure conflicts and violence in Chittagong Hill Tracts

Violent clashes between indigenous communities and Bengali settlers have been increasing dramatically in the CHT as issues of land rights and tenure become more and more contentious. The Kapeeng Foundation, a Bangladeshi NGO, reports that land grabbing has accelerated in the CHT in recent years. In 2014 alone, 3,911 acres of land in CHT were grabbed by state or non-state actors, while they suggest roughly 84,647 acres of land is either being illegally occupied or in the process of being acquired. Over the course of 2014, around 102 indigenous families were forced off their land, while a further 886 families were under threat of eviction. They also report that 153 indigenous families were attacked with the aim of grabbing their land in 2014.[109]

Violent conflict is becoming commonplace as land tensions escalate. In a particularly severe instance of communal violence, on August 3, 2013, indigenous people in six villages were attacked after rumors spread that indigenous persons had kidnapped a Bengali motorcyclist. A cycle of attack and retaliation caused more than 2,000 indigenous families to flee across the border to Tripura, India. Thirty-four houses were burned, two Buddhist temples damaged, and 259 homes looted.[110] Indigenous women have been increasingly targeted for sexual assault, with over 122 indigenous women assaulted in 2014 alone, including well-known indigenous leader of *Jatiya Adivasi Parishad* (JAP) and elected member of local *union parishad* (local governing body) Bichitra Tirki. The government has made overtures to address rising tensions and continue implementation of the 1997 Peace Accord, but has not taken decisive steps towards either end.

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3.4.2 Socially engaged Buddhism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's Buddhist community has important socially active elements, with many temples hosting schools, medical clinics, and other community services. Several larger temple-based associations have been formed with the joint objectives of growing and supporting Buddhism in Bangladesh and providing other social services to communities. The Bangladesh Buddhist Association, one of the oldest, was founded in 1889 and is based at Chittagong Buddhist Monastery. It has played a critical role in the regeneration of Buddhism in Bangladesh, and it remains a focal institution for the Buddhist community, running a variety of educational and health projects. Bangladesh Bouddha Kristi Prachar Sangha, founded in 1949 and centered at Dhaka's Dhammarajika temple, is another key organization running schools, clinics, and community savings groups.

Indigenous Buddhists in CHT have their own institutions. Many of the larger and more influential institutions are rooted in Chakma communities, the region's largest indigenous group. Moanoghar, a Buddhist community organization based in Rangamati district, served as a critically important resource for indigenous youth throughout the insurgency period (1977-1997) and today provides quality education in academic and technical subjects to disadvantaged youth from across the region. With cultural events and community health clinics, it is also a social hub. Another noteworthy socially engaged Buddhist endeavor is Parbatya Bouddha Mission in Khagrachari, which operates an orphanage, health center, school, and vocational training center.

3.5 Christianity in Bangladesh

The Indian subcontinent is home to a number of longstanding Christian communities, some of which trace their history as far back as St. Thomas the Apostle's legendary conversions on the Malabar Coast of Kerala in 58 CE. However, compared to Bangladesh's other major religions, Christianity is a relative newcomer to the region, introduced in the sixteenth century by Portuguese merchants. Christians in Bangladesh number only roughly 300,000 individuals, making up just 0.2 percent of the country's population. Roman Catholics account for roughly half of that number. Despite their small numbers, Christians have considerable social influence. Christian communities are often highly educated and have produced many leaders in both the business and the development communities of Bangladesh.

Figure 9. Christian percent of the population
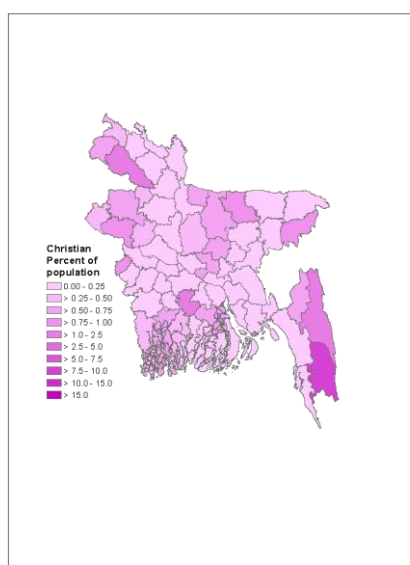
The Christian community is well organized and is especially committed to development and humanitarian goals. The community supports many FIOs, several of which are highly influential. Though their capacity and focal issues vary widely, many Christian FIOs are well-funded and have significant international linkages. Christian organizations were leaders during post-Liberation War and Cyclone Bhola recovery efforts. In short, they are among Bangladesh's most well-respected development organizations.

3.5.1 Roman Catholicism

The first Portuguese expedition into what is now Bangladesh visited Chittagong in 1517. By 1577, they had received permission from the Mughal emperor, Akbar the Great, to construct settlements and establish churches. The first church in

Bangladesh was consecrated by Jesuits in 1600, but was burned just two years later. Its founder, Father Francesco Fernandez, was imprisoned where he died, as Bangladeshi Catholics suggest, from torture. Today he is considered the first Christian martyr in Bangladesh. The Jesuits were the predominant order during Christianity's early years in East Bengal, though Dominicans and Augustinians founded churches during this period as well. The Augustinians, who arrived in 1599, took over the East Bengal mission upon the departure of the Jesuits and operated there for roughly 250 years. The Holy Rosary Church in Dhaka, founded by Augustinians in 1677, is the oldest extant church in Bangladesh.

By far the most numerous and important Catholic order in Bangladesh today are the Holy Cross Brothers and Sisters. East Bengal was among the first Holy Cross missions outside of France and was established not long after the order had expanded into the United States and Canada in the mid-nineteenth century. With the Holy Cross eager to enter foreign mission work, Rome asked if they would like to take over the challenging East Bengal mission, which the Augustinians had recently abandoned. No other orders had expressed interest. The first Holy Cross brothers arrived in 1852. It was primarily brothers from North America that staffed the mission: of the 132 foreign brothers 79 were from the United States, 50 were from Canada, and three were from France. Holy Cross has been involved in significant social outreach, notably through education both in parish schools and well-renowned colleges in Dhaka and Chittagong, notably St Gregory's, Notre Dame College, St Joseph's, and St Placidus'.

The years after the Second Vatican council and Bangladeshi Independence saw increasing local control of the church. Theotonius Amal Ganguly became the first Bengali Archbishop of Dhaka in 1967. The numbers of Holy Cross brothers coming from abroad declined and the vast majority of the roughly 90 Holy Cross brothers currently active in Bangladesh are now of local origin. The Jesuits restarted their mission in 1993, but maintain a very small community. Two Maryknoll fathers are very grassroots-focused, working and living in local villages. The Salesians of Don Bosco operate a school in Dhaka.

Bangladesh long consisted of four dioceses, each overseen by a specific order: Rajshahi controlled by Italians from the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missionaries, Dhaka controlled by American Holy Cross Brothers, Chittagong controlled by French Canadian Holy Cross Brothers, and Khulna controlled by Italian Xaverian Brothers. There are now six dioceses in Bangladesh: Chittagong, Dinajpur, Khulna, Mymesingh, Sylhet, and Rajshahi, as well as one metropolitan archdiocese: Dhaka city. As Archbishop of Dhaka, Patrick D'Rozario is the highest-ranking bishop in the country.

The Catholic community today comes from diverse origins. Father Tapan de Rozario notes that Catholics in Bangladesh can be divided into five general groups: descendants of the Portuguese and early converts (30 percent), low-caste Hindu converts (20 percent), converts from *adivasi* or indigenous groups (45 percent), converts from Islam (three percent), and Anglicized Catholics (two percent). [111]

3.5.2 Protestant Christianity

Protestant Christianity first came to Bengal with agents of the East India Company, roughly a century after the arrival of the Portuguese, though explicit proselytism was banned in British territories. It was not until 1793, with the arrival of William Carey of the Baptist Missionary Society in Serampore, then a Danish colony in present-day West Bengal, that more overt attempts at conversion began. The Serampore missionaries were influential proponents of education reform in India, founding many vernacular and formal schools and developing new curriculum and Bengali language textbooks. William Carey, along with Joshua Marshman and William Ward, founded Serampore College in 1829, a pioneering effort in higher education that granted degrees in the arts and sciences. The years that followed saw a large influx of Protestant missionaries from a number of denominations as the ban on proselytism in the colony was lifted.

Protestant churches in Bangladesh can generally be grouped into ecumenical and evangelical denominations, each with its own apex organization. The National Council of Churches (an affiliate of the World Council of Churches) includes the large mainstream denominations, including the Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha, the Church of Bangladesh (Anglican), and the Bangladesh Methodist Church. The National Christian Fellowship of Bangladesh (an affiliate of the World Evangelical Alliance) includes a range of smaller evangelical Baptist, Lutheran, and Pentecostal denominations. Outside of these main umbrella groups, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church maintains a significant presence in Bangladesh.

As with other religious minorities, Christian communities have been targeted for violence in recent years. As a small minority with little electoral clout, there have not been the same political motivations behind attacks. The motive in many incidents may be theft, as there is a perception that Christian institutions are affluent. A noteworthy recent incident occurred on July 6, 2014 at the convent of the Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions Nuns in Boldipuku, Dinajpur. It is reported that 60 men raided and looted the compound and several nuns were victims of sexual assault. A significant amount of cash and property was stolen.

4. Mapping Faith-inspired Development in Bangladesh

4.1 NGOs and Civil Society in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's civil society has developed as one of the largest and most innovative NGO sectors in the world, renowned for its vibrant and active grassroots work. Unlike many other countries, Bangladesh's largest and most influential NGOs are locally founded and operated. Bangladeshi NGOs also have a global reputation as being some of the world's most innovative. Grameen Bank, for example, is credited with developing and spreading microfinance, influencing anti-poverty programs globally. BRAC is the best known of Bangladesh's NGOs and is considered the world's largest, with offices and programs in 11 countries that provide services to about 135 million people.

It is challenging to quantify the numbers of civil society organizations active in Bangladesh, their work, and their impact. Organizations vary greatly in terms of size, activities, and legal forms. Giving some indication of the sheer size of the sector, a 2005 World Bank study found that there were 206,000 organizations in Bangladesh that could be termed non-profit.[112] The most significant at the national level register as NGOs and as of January 1, 2015, 2,333 NGOs were officially registered with the Bangladesh government (registration with the government's NGO Affairs Bureau is necessary for civil society organizations to receive foreign funding, while smaller organizations that source local funding can register as a civil society organization or a cooperative - see box).[113] A World Bank estimate indicates that the NGO sector in Bangladesh accounts for six to eight percent of annual GDP, and that between 20 and 35 percent of the population receives some type of service—typically credit, education, or healthcare—from an NGO.[114]

Historically, faith actors were the principle actors in Bangladesh civil society, and many civil society organizations today retain a religious character. Acts of charity in all of Bangladesh's religious traditions were organized for centuries through village-level religious institutions. Since the sixteenth century, Christian missionaries have built and operated schools, hospitals, and orphanages that were affiliated with Christian institutions.[115] Many NGOs in Bangladesh today evolved from or were influenced by religious welfare societies.[116]

NGOs in their modern form began to emerge en masse in the 1970s. The new government was woefully ill-equipped to deal with the humanitarian aftermath of the 1970 Bhola cyclone and 1971 Liberation War. The Bhola cyclone was the deadliest tropical cyclone on record, with an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 casualties.[117] UNICEF estimates that about 4.5 million people lost their land, homes, and sources of livelihood in the storm.[118] The aftermath of the cyclone also drew international attention and funds were directed to many fledgling local NGOs, which contributed significantly to their growth and development. Local and international

NGOs provided humanitarian services, and many more local voluntary charitable organizations emerged around the country. Faith-inspired organizations played an important role in disaster response during this period, particularly prominent Christian organizations including Christian Organization for Relief and Rehabilitation (now known as Caritas) and Christian Commission for the Development of Bangladesh (CCDB). Both organizations play a major role in the Bangladeshi development community today.

In light of so many needs in Bangladesh, bilateral and multilateral institutions provided continued support in the post-war period. By 2000, NGOs were receiving about 17 percent of overseas development assistance (ODA) flows to Bangladesh. Ten large Bangladeshi NGOs receive 85 percent of this ODA, with many smaller organizations continuing to rely on various philanthropies and government assistance.[119]

Box 13. NGO registration in Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh's Department of Social Services is responsible for the registration of social welfare organizations in Bangladesh. Under a government assistance fund, it provides financial and technical support to registered organizations. Organizations are required to meet established guidelines to have their registration approved and to file annual reports and audited accounts yearly. Smaller and less formal groups can register with the Department of Cooperatives, which operates under the Rural Development and Cooperative Division of the Ministry of Local Government. The government established the NGO Affairs Bureau in 1990 to oversee NGOs compliance with the Foreign Donation Regulation and Foreign Currency Regulations ordinances.

The Asian Development Bank outlines the following responsibilities of the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB):

- NGO registration
- Approval of project proposals and releasing funds
- Approval of expatriate consultants
- Scrutiny and evaluation of statements and reports on projects
- Monitoring and evaluating NGO projects
- Receiving information on foreign travel by NGO personnel
- All other matters relating to NGOs receiving foreign funds

Registration and monitoring guidelines with the NGOAB are strict and require approval by the Home Ministry and one other relevant ministry. Each NGO is required to submit a five year plan and for each grant, submit a project proposal and letter of intent. All foreign funds must go through approved bank accounts and provide full accounts of all transactions. The NGOAB suffers from severe capacity constraints and delays; staff numbers have not increased since its creation, although the number of NGOs has since tripled. [120]
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NGOs and accountability

The considerable proliferation of NGOs in Bangladesh that provide services, such as education and healthcare, has continued in large part because the government has lacked the capacity and resources to provide sufficient public services, particularly in rural areas and urban slums. The large presence of NGOs is also related to the dampening impact of corruption on public provision of such services.

NGOs have undeniably made major contributions to development in Bangladesh. However, there are also concerns that NGOs have created an environment in which the government is not held accountable for the lack and poor quality of public services. Some see NGO service provision as a kind of privatization of public services, which erodes the link of accountability between the state and its citizens. This situation has been termed the 'franchise state.'[121] This line of argument suggests that, by depoliticizing the provision of public services, NGOs have inadvertently broken the link between social mobilization and the political arena, creating a vicious cycle in which NGOs continue to fill the gap because civil society does not put pressure on the government to provide such services.[122]

Another issue is whether development NGOs can act with impunity since they are not held accountable through the same electoral institutions as the government. The overwhelming presence of BRAC, for example, has led to accusations that the organization acts as a "parallel state."[123] NGOs like BRAC and Grameen have developed enterprises that generate income, helping to make them more sustainable but also leading to potential conflicts of interest. For example, BRAC has been accused of linking access to microfinance credit with the purchase of particular hybrid seeds, pesticides, and fertilizer.[124]

However, by providing services where the government cannot, NGOs clearly demonstrate the ways in which the government is falling short, thereby raising awareness about corruption and pressuring the government to reform. NGOs such as Transparency International Bangladesh have played a crucial role in raising civil society awareness about corruption and similar governance problems.

4.2 Faith-inspired Organizations in Bangladesh

With the historical importance of religion in Bangladeshi civil society and the strong focus on social welfare and community service in these traditions, a significant number of NGOs in Bangladesh take inspiration for their work from faith and have strong ties to religious institutions. These faith-inspired organizations (FIOs) are rooted in a range of religious traditions and vary widely in size, activities, and character, from large and highly regarded international NGOs, such as World Vision or Islamic Relief, to local grassroots groups. They may choose to self-identify under a

number of designations: FIO, FBO, NGO, religious charity, etc. WFDD's research uses the term FIO as an inclusive definition that includes any organization engaged in development work, broadly defined, whose mission and vision is inspired or guided by the teachings of a religious tradition or sub-sect and organizations whose history is deeply rooted in such traditions. Within this diverse group, the role of religion in organizational missions or operations also varies: some organizations place religious propagation as central while they engage in social welfare work and other organizations see religious values as simply undergirding more formal relief and development work.

This initial mapping of FIOs in Bangladesh focuses on organizations with a national profile and reach. The scope is limited to organizations that are formally registered with the Bureau of NGO Affairs. These organizations are the most formalized and most easily accessed. Unlike the numerous grassroots faith-based CSOs, FIOs registered with the Bangladeshi NGO Affairs Bureau represent the largest and most influential faith-inspired organizations working in development. They often have major funding sources from overseas through grants from large-scale donors, international religious charities, or wealthy individuals abroad. In contrast to grassroots faith-based CSOs, because of their international connections, they have significant expertise on a range of development issues and are up-to-date with international best practice.

Several large and influential FIOs in Bangladesh source their funding exclusively from local sources and therefore need not officially register as NGOs. For example Anjuman Mufidul Islam, founded in 1905, is the oldest Muslim charity working in Bangladesh. Additionally, a number of Islamic organizations maintain formal or informal relationships with Bangladesh's largest Islamic political party Jamaat-e-Islami. The most significant of these is the Islamic Bank Foundation, which is the development arm of the Islamic Bank, Bangladesh's largest provider of Islamic microfinance. Within the Christian tradition, several of the largest and most important Catholic religious orders also do not register with the Bureau of NGO Affairs. A notable example is the Holy Cross Brothers who engage extensively in a variety of social welfare activities including education.

This initial mapping does not, for the most part, take into account faith-inspired civil society organizations (CSOs) and smaller informal religious groups. These groups are key providers of social support in the lives of many Bangladeshis. Nonetheless, because of their localized and informal nature, it was beyond the scope of this study to identify and adequately research the numerous faith-inspired grassroots organizations within their local context. Future research by WFDD in partnership with BRAC University should shed some light on the nature and activities of such organizations within a limited but strategic sample.

As of January 1, 2015, 2,333 NGOs are registered with the Government of Bangladesh's Bureau of NGO Affairs. Of these, 152 or roughly six percent, have an explicit faith affiliation. This figure should be taken as a rough approximation as the official registration list can contain defunct or inactive organizations, and it is not uncommon for one organization to maintain registration under multiple names. Of the 152 registered FIOs, 70 are Christian, 60 are Muslim, 11 are Buddhist, ten are Hindu, and one is multi-faith. These numbers illustrate a large proportion of Christian FIOs given the small Christian population (0.2 percent of the total). These figures should be seen against the estimated thousands of grassroots Muslim organizations, many of which operate using zakat or funds gained from the sale of animal skins following Eid al-Azhar as well as other fundraising methods. These organizations often operate as CSOs as they do not seek international funds that would require registration as an NGO.

Roughly 50 of the FIOs registered with the Bureau of NGO Affairs are headquartered outside of Bangladesh. These international FIOs consist exclusively of Christian and Islamic organizations, including large international NGOs such as World Vision, World Relief, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid, Adventist Development and Relief Organization, Mennonite Central Committee, and Habitat for Humanity International. International Christian organizations are based in the United States, Canada, the UK, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, South Korea, and other countries. Islamic organizations have headquarters in the UK or the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE.

As with secular NGOs, some of the most important FIOs in Bangladesh are Bangladeshi and have a specifically national focus. Caritas Bangladesh, the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh, the Sufi-inspired Ahsania Mission, and Ramakrishna Mission Bangladesh all have long histories of social service in Bangladesh. They were leaders in the post-independence period, pioneering development strategies and influencing the growth of the NGO sector for which Bangladesh has become famous. Although many of these organizations were founded in the post-independence periods, other NGOs including BRAC, Proshika, Grameen Bank, and Association for Social Advancement have come to eclipse them in size and influence. Still, these national FIOs are respected in Bangladesh as some of the most trusted development institutions.

The great diversity of FIOs operating in Bangladesh makes it challenging--and of limited utility--to generalize about their histories, activities, and social influence. The following section draws attention to specific faith-inspired efforts on key development challenges in Bangladesh to illustrate the breadth of development work undertaken by FIOs and highlight key emerging issues. The FIO profiles draw attention to some of the unique and innovative strategies and approaches employed by these organizations in response to the key development challenges articulated during the London consultation.

4.3 Faith-inspired Organizations Case Studies by Sector

4.3.1 Poverty reduction

Bangladesh has seen a dramatic reduction in poverty over the last two decades, and reducing poverty is a national development priority. The national poverty headcount ratio, the percent of the population living under the national poverty line of $2 per day, declined from about 56 percent in 1992 to 32 percent in 2010.[125] The absolute number of those living in poverty has also seen a steady decline from 44 million in 2000 to 26 million in 2010.

Increases in labor income and a reduction in fertility rates over this period are seen as the primary driver of poverty reduction overall. [126] In particular, explosive growth in the ready-made garments sector since the end of the 1980s, which accounts for roughly 80 percent of the country's export income, has contributed to rising per capita income and has provided increased opportunities for employment for women, who had traditionally been excluded from the formal economy, giving many families an additional source of income. Overall, however, women's participation in formal labor market remains low at 35 percent compared to 80 percent for men as of 2010.[127] Remittances have also steadily increased since the 1980s, accounting for about ten percent of national GDP in 2013. Bangladesh ranks in the top ten remittance-receiving countries in the world, receiving about $14 billion in 2013.[128]

Though Bangladesh is on track to significantly exceed MDG targets for poverty reduction, overall poverty rates remain high and per capita GDP lags significantly behind South Asia as a whole. While poverty reduction has occurred across urban and rural areas, extreme poverty, or those living under the international poverty line of $1.25 a day, remains a largely rural phenomenon: while only 7.7 percent of those in urban areas lived in extreme poverty in 2010, the figure was 21.1 percent for those in rural areas. [129] Even though manufacturing is becoming increasingly important to Bangladesh's economy, nearly half of Bangladesh's workforce remains employed in agriculture, and as of 2010 that sector provided 45 percent of total household income nationally.[130] The rural poor are especially vulnerable to climate shocks and regularly cope with seasonal depravation, particularly in Rangpur division, which has the highest rate of poverty in the country.

Figure 10. GDP per Capita (Constant 2005 US $)
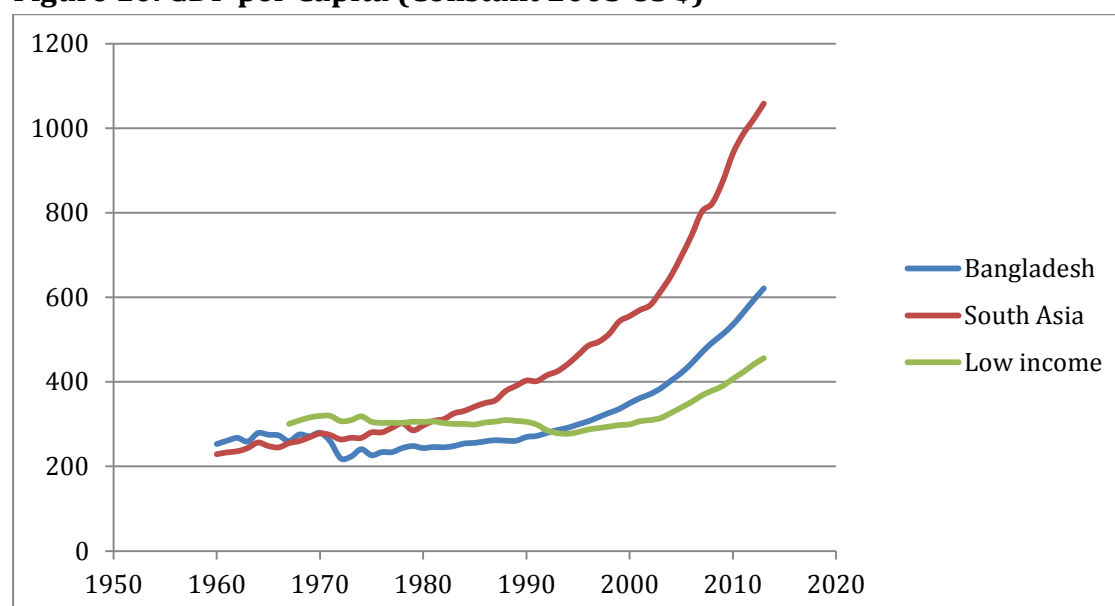
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank 2014

Table 5. Urban and rural poverty (percent of total population)

	Poverty			Extreme Poverty		
	2000	2005	2010	2000	2005	2010
National	48.9	40.0	31.5	34.3	25.1	17.6
Urban	35.2	28.4	21.3	19.9	14.6	7.7
Rural	52.3	43.8	35.2	37.9	28.6	27.1

Source: Bangladesh Poverty Assessment, World Bank 2013

Microfinance, since it was popularized in Bangladesh by Muhammad Yunus' Grameen Bank in the early 1970s, has revolutionized approaches for poverty reduction and reduced the need for the rural poor to rely on the traditional system of moneylenders, which was largely predatory. Prior to the advent of microlending however, faith groups played important roles in combating poverty, most notably collecting and distributing *zakat*, the Islamic system of tithing, which forms one of the five pillars of Islam. Bangladesh's Christian communities have long championed the cause of the poor and oppressed, as have Hindu and Buddhist reformers.

Building on these long traditions, FIOs are extensively involved in poverty reduction efforts in Bangladesh and these programs are often flagship programs for these organizations. Despite the prolific nature of microfinance in Bangladesh, many FIOs run poverty reduction programs on altogether different models. For many Muslim organizations, the Islamic prohibition on the collection of interest necessitates alternative approaches, but for others, including among Christian organizations, there is a sense that collecting interest violates the spirit of their charitable endeavors. In many cases FIOs focus on savings groups and income generating activity (IGA) training. Below are some notable examples of faith-inspired poverty reduction efforts that employ unique and noteworthy models.

Box14. Islamic micro-finance in Bangladesh

The Islamic microfinance sector developed as a response to concerns that existing formal financial services among micro-finance providers did not comply with Islamic principles, which prohibits the collection of interest. In contrast to secular microfinance organizations, Islamic Microfinance Institutions (IMFIs) do not charge interest; this principle is derived from two precepts of sharia law: that money should not be bought or sold as a commodity, and that providers of funds should behave like investors rather than creditors, taking on some of the risk themselves. Other key principles of Islamic finance include material finality, that all financial investments should be made in real assets, and that activities that are forbidden by sharia should not be financed. In Islamic finance, all contracts should be mutually agreed upon.[131] In addition, IMFIs use funding from religious institutions and other forms of voluntary charity in addition to funding from foreign donors and the government.[132]

Studies have found a significant demand for Islamic microfinance products, with 20 to 40 percent of respondents from 19 Muslim countries, including Bangladesh, indicating that for religious reasons they do not use traditional financial institutions.[133] However, the sector is very small in Bangladesh, representing only one percent of the microfinance market.[134] In Bangladesh, studies show that clients of Islamic microfinance institutions have been more likely to use the loan for income-generating activities as compared with Grameen Bank clients.[135] Nevertheless, various challenges have limited scaling up and implementation of Islamic microfinance in Bangladesh, notably funding, and many IMFIs cannot reach the poorest due to a lack of resources. Islamic microfinance institutions are also relatively new in Bangladesh and therefore tend to have less experience and fewer relationships with local communities as well as international donors. The dominance of secular microfinance organizations also poses a barrier to market entry.[136]

Table 6. Differences between conventional MFIs and IMFIs

	Conventional MFIs	Islamic MFIs
Sources of Funds	Foreign donors, multilateral and national agencies, government, central banks, savings of clients	Religious institutions, Islamic charitable sources, savings of clients, foreign donors, national agencies, private sector
Mode of financing	Interest-based	Non-interest bearing financial instruments
Financing the poorest	The extreme poor are usually left out of the financing model	The extreme poor are integrated in the financing model by integrating the Zakah (act of giving) principles in the model
Funds transfer	Cash	Goods
Deductions at inception of contract	Percentage of funds deducted from principle	No deductions from principle
Methods of dealing with defaults	Group/centre pressure	Group/spouse guarantee, and Islamic ethics
Social development programme	Secular, ethical and social development	Religious which includes behaviour, ethics, and social values

Source: *Habib Ahmed, 2002, Financing Microenterprises: An Analytical Study of Islamic Microfinance Institutions.*

Source: UNDP, "Scaling up Islamic Microfinance in Bangladesh through the Private Sector: Experience of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL)," 2012.

End of box_____

4.3.1.1 Islamic Relief Bangladesh

Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), an INGO based in the UK, was founded in response to the famines in Ethiopia and Sudan in 1984 with a mission to be a "global role model in assisting individuals, groups, and institutions to develop safe and caring communities."[137] As its name suggests, IRW has its roots in emergency response and the organization has expanded since into various countries largely in response to major disasters. It now has offices in about 40 countries. In 1991, Chittagong was hit by a major cyclone that killed approximately 134,000 people. In response, Islamic Relief UK along with its partners in different countries collected funds and coordinated an emergency response program. Typically IRW withdraws once the emergency relief period is over, however, given Bangladesh's status as a uniquely disaster-prone country, IRW decided to establish a longer-term presence in Bangladesh through a new organization, Islamic Relief Bangladesh (IRB). IRB draws inspiration for its work from "the timeless values and teachings provided by the revelations contained within the Qur'an and prophetic example most specifically: Sincerity *(Ikhlas)*, Social Justice *(Ihsan)*, Compassion (*Rahma)*, and Custodianship (*Amana*)"[138].

Broadly speaking, IRB is actively involved in six areas: humanitarian assistance and early recovery, climate change and disaster resilience, sustainable livelihoods, orphan and child welfare, health and nutrition, and water and sanitation. Emergency relief remains a priority sector within the organization: Shabel Firuz (country director of IRB) reports "over the last five to seven years... we have really built up our expertise quite substantially in this area [emergency relief]. There are other organizations doing this but we are really trying to mainstream disaster risk reduction in our program areas as part of our human development program."[139]

In terms of poverty reduction a key focus of IRB is food security and Income Generating Activities (IGAs). IRB's strategy in each community is based on needs assessment, which attempts to identify the unique challenges in the community. The selection process for beneficiaries is based on a set of criteria that targets the most vulnerable and those excluded by other programs. Firuz explains, "We usually target women-headed households, the elderly, people with chronic illnesses, and people with disabilities. Then after that, the ones with no breadwinner or no income source in their household, or those that are landless, or have very little land." Fifty is the cut off age for beneficiaries for many other microfinance programs, but the average age of the beneficiaries of IRB is 50. This suggests IRB is not catering towards those beneficiaries who can ensure the payments but those where they can have the biggest impact on poverty reduction and improvement of lives of the rural poor in Bangladesh. Firuz notes that IRB is "taking the most vulnerable, the most extreme poor, and those women that are left out by other organizations."

IRB has utilized several approaches to poverty reduction and has learnt many collective lessons since it began its work in this sector in 1994. Its current model is known as an "asset transfer model," which, as Shabel Firuz explains, "is just not about giving them microfinance or putting them through workshops or raising awareness, it is about transferring real assets, and giving them real IGAs and hands on training and support." IRB's approach assures that assets are provided to the beneficiaries as opposed to finance, a result of the Islamic principles that guide the organization. Charging interest is forbidden in Islam and the organization does not support interest-based microfinance mechanisms; rather they have worked to develop several alternative models. One approach used by the organization is a "self-help group approach," which according to Firuz is more along cooperative lines. The cash transfer is made by IRB to the group and women use this money to buy an asset. The women themselves decide the credit amount based on what they can afford and return it back to the group. IRB argues that this approach not only provides interest-free access to finance, but also promotes mutual solidarity among women in the groups.

The unique aspect of this approach is that beneficiaries are not introduced to IGAs that are new to them but can decide what they want to do based on their skills and experience. IRB then makes small groups of 10 to 15 women and provides the beneficiaries with training based on their knowledge and interests. This approach has shown encouraging results: IRB has been able to take "a beneficiary from being extremely poor to someone who is at village level, earning the equivalent of what a government worker is getting or more in the urban area," according to Firuz. In one project funded by the EU, IRB was able to increase income by a factor of 540 percent in four years' time.

One of their more recent projects, implemented from January 2009 to September 2012 under the Sustainable Livelihoods program, was the Health Education and Livelihood Support Program for the Ultra Poor (Help UP).[140] This program targeted 10,000 ultra-poor households of three *upazilas* of Rangpur district. The World Bank considers Rangpur to have the highest incidence of poverty in Bangladesh with a poverty rate of 42 percent; it represents a persistent pocket of extreme poverty in Bangladesh.[141] One of the major focuses of the Help Up project was IGA and skill development for women beneficiaries. Beneficiaries were organized into 840 women's groups. Additionally they were assisted on selecting feasible business interests, and each beneficiary received training in one IGA of their choice. A monitoring and evaluation report noted that the average income level of beneficiaries had increased to BDT 4,919 against the baseline figure of BDT 1,109 per month- a figure that is 4.4 times that of the baseline level. By the end of the programs, 99 percent of beneficiaries had multiplied their productive assets 2.75 fold.[142]

4.3.1.2 Masjid Council for Community Advancement

Masjid Council for Community Advancement (MACCA), an NGO in Bangladesh inspired by Islamic principles, was founded in 1999. The organization's mission is to "promote sustainable and integrated development and social harmony to overcome people's vulnerability and sufferings irrespective of their religion, race, ethnicity, or gender and promote the culture peace and cooperation in the society."[143] Abul Kalam Azad, a prominent member of Jammat-e-Islami, televangelist, and madrasa teacher, founded the organization, citing inspiration from his own impoverished childhood and a desire to improve the lives of poor and marginalized people.[144] In 2013, Azad was sentenced to death on counts of murder, rape, and genocide as part of the ongoing ICT trials for his role in pro-Pakistan paramilitary groups during the Liberation War.[145] He was tried *in absentia* and is believed to have fled to India or Pakistan. In spite of the association with its founder, MACCA retains a positive reputation and remains engaged in projects with major western donors.

MACCA approaches the issue of poverty from a holistic perspective, conceptualizing poverty as a multidimensional issue and an "outcome of structural injustices of the society and system."[146] Faith inspires MACCA's poverty reduction mission and approach, and the organization adheres to the view that human beings are innately empowered by Allah and that disempowerment through poverty is an affront to God. The organization also implements projects in other development sectors including healthcare, education, HIV/AIDS, legal support to the poor, and emergency response.

MACCA's main poverty reduction program is Hasana, which aims to reduce poverty and empower the poor through *zakat*, one of the main traditional strategies for poverty reduction in the Islamic tradition. The project's target beneficiaries are poor households in Manikonj district where the program has been running since 2005. Hasana utilizes a group-based approach that pools zakat funds to finance income-generating activities (IGAs). The project creates Hasana groups, transferring the capital formed by zakat to them to run and manage development activities. The project, which ensures effective community ownership in all phases, also provides training to improve efficiency of IGAs. Currently MACCA has 29 Hasana groups that include 950 poor and extremely poor households.[147] About 150 households that were enrolled in the Hasana program in 2005 have emerged from poverty. A midterm review found that the average household income showed a significant increase from TK 3,000 in 2005 to TK 7,000 in 2008, an improvement of 133 percent in just three years.[148]

Above all, MACCA is well known for its extensive network of imams and faith leaders with which it conducts regular trainings and engages extensively in its programs. This puts MACCA in an "ideal position to facilitate faith-based partnerships in development and humanitarian work and to initiate culturally appropriate and effective interfaith campaigns to address people's values, misconceptions, and behavioral issues deep rooted in the culture and traditional practices of the society."[149] Because of these strong connections with religious leaders in Bangladesh's orthodox Islamic community, MACCA is an important partner for prominent development stakeholders and organizations including the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Bangladesh Government, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), USAID, UNAIDS, the World Bank, the Social Development Foundation, Asia Foundation, BRAC, and UNICEF.

4.3.1.4 Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh

The Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) was founded in 1973 with a mission to "create a society where the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable people can claim and enjoy their rights and seek justice for a sustainable livelihood."[150] CCDB began as the Bangladesh Ecumenical Relief and Humanitarian Services or the BERHS, the relief and development wing of the National Council of Churches, the local affiliate of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Like many other organizations formed in the wake of Cyclone Bhola and the Liberation War, CCDB focused initially on relief and rehabilitation activities. Over time CCDB's activities expanded in scope and branched into new sectors. As the National Council of Churches had difficulty in coordination the various activities, a decision was taken in 1973, in coordination with the WCC, to form a new organization called CCDB. With emergency recovery well underway, CCDB's focus shifted from relief and humanitarian services to rehabilitation and development. Because of the extent of their efforts CCDB became one of the most influential development organizations in that period.

The Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Program (CPRP) is CCDB's flagship program and is implemented through community-based people's forums. The main focus is poverty alleviation, but the program also includes specific development activities around women's empowerment, food security, and sustainable livelihoods. Through CPRP, CCDB provides forum members with training, resources, and assistance in agriculture, animal husbandry, aquaculture, horticulture, and seed production as a way of providing livelihood options for poor families, to supplement household income, and to boost household food security.[151] Seasonal unemployment is common in Bangladesh for many landless agricultural laborers, so CCDB stresses income diversification to cope with seasonality income.

A unique aspect of CCDB's approach is reliance on beneficiary groups, called forums or as Joyanta Adhikari, Executive Director of CCDB calls them, "people's institutions."[152] Adhikari observes that, "in the 1980's we realized that if we really wanted to go for sustainable development, we needed to start people's institutions that could carry on many of these development activities and encourage community ownership. What we call the 'people's institutions' model is fundamental to all of our projects, even in micro-credit." These small community-based people's organizations (forums) become sustainable institutions that can act as a social force for empowerment. Once the forums are created, CCDB runs its programs through them as local partners. CCDB field level staff members supervise the activities of the forums and also monitor their financial accounting.[153] In 2014, there were a total of 922 forums, of which 388 were phase-in or 'younger' forums, 265 were status quo or 'older' forums, and 269 were phase-out or 'graduated' forums. Younger and older forums get support from CCDB to enhance their managerial, financial, and leadership capabilities. Graduated forums act as independent entities without this level of support but still maintain a strong link with CCDB.[154] Joyanta Adhikari emphasizes that the goal of transforming communities is not rooted in a goal of evangelism: "While we say that it is a Christian organization, it is secular in nature. We are not an organization who is for conversion, I mean not theological conversion, but we are converting. We are converting from one stage to another stage; from a poor marginalized community to a sustainable community. In that way we are evangelizing in a development sense."

4.3.2 Child Health and Nutrition

Bangladesh has made progress in the area of child health, and recent government commitments are encouraging and suggest opportunities to further build on gains in this area. In 2013, the government launched a multi-stakeholder initiative that committed to reduce preventable child death to 20 per 1,000 live births by 2035.[155] In the same year, the parliament passed the Children Act, enacted to ensure national compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.[156]

Child malnutrition, however, remains a persistent challenge. Bangladesh has the sixth highest number of stunted children in the world and the fifth highest number of moderately or severely wasted children.[157] There has been little progress made in reducing stunting and wasting levels over the past decade (see table 6).

Table 6: Stunting, Wasting, and Underweight Levels in under-five children

	Stunting		Wasting		Underweight	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
1996-1997	39.4	56.2	12.8	18.2	41.9	57.8
2011	36.2	42.7	14.0	16.0	28.0	37.0

Source: BDHS 1996-97, 2004, 2007, 2011.

The factors that contribute to child undernutrition in Bangladesh are diverse, and include previous birth interval, size at birth, mother's body mass index at birth, and parent's education,[158] as well as unequal access to government programs, inadequate access to healthcare, and food insecurity.[159] Parental education has been demonstrated to be critical to addressing child nutrition: one study in Bangladesh found that maternal education in particular played a crucial role in reducing the prevalence of stunting among children.[160] In this regard, increased female education enrollment provides some promise for this area.

Concern for the well-being of children has been a common focus of faith traditions historically and it remains so today among FIOs in Bangladesh. Christian FIOs in particular, including World Vision, are among the leaders in the sector, pioneering multi-sectoral approaches that focus on education and behavior change. In some cases these programs have worked with local faith leaders to deliver health messages. The following represent select examples of faith-inspired efforts to combat child undernutrition and bolster local health infrastructure in Bangladesh.

4.3.2.1 World Vision

World Vision (WV), an international Christian relief organization, was founded in 1950 in Monrovia, California.[161] WV began as a child sponsorship program but over time has expanded its programs considerably while maintaining its focus on serving vulnerable children and mothers. As with many other INGOs, WV made its first entry into Bangladesh during Cyclone Bhola in 1970 when it was involved in extensive humanitarian relief efforts. After independence, WV was invited to continue a relief and rehabilitation program in Rangpur division where rates of extreme poverty were most severe, working closely with the Government of Bangladesh. In 1972 it formally started its operation as World Vision Bangladesh (WVB).[162] World Vision takes inspiration for its relief and development programs from the Christian faith, seeking to serve "the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional

love for all people."[163] One of the largest international FIOs in Bangladesh, WVB is currently active in 84 program locations, thereby making an impact on the lives of approximately 5 million people, including 1 million children from 35 districts of Bangladesh. Programming covers eight key areas: maternal and child health and nutrition, HIV/AIDS, humanitarian and emergency affairs, education, food security, economic development, gender and development, child rights, and institutional capacity development.

WVB's core work in Bangladesh is the wellbeing of mothers and children. WVB is working to fulfill four child wellbeing aspirations, helping children to: enjoy good health, be educated for life, experience love of God and their neighbor, and be cared for.[164] Because malnutrition has long been one of the premier child health challenges in Bangladesh, WVB runs nutrition programs in 66 Area Development Programs (ADP) out of its 78 ADPs in 32 districts in Bangladesh.

WVB's nutrition intervention strategies are based on the Positive Deviance Hearth (PD/Hearth) model, which means that WVB looks for positive deviance when initiating a project in a new community. Among families of the same socioeconomic group, WVB looks for families with well-nourished children and determines what they do differently, which can be something as simple as hand washing. This is why WVB approaches the issue from multiple angles, often linking nutritional programs with other interventions such as WASH, food security, and education; focusing on assessing community needs, the program is customized with local approaches. WVB reports that the PD/Hearth program was implemented in 62 ADPs, reaching 41,245 children aged 6-35 months in 2013.[165] An analysis conducted by WV's international nutrition center of expertise found 84 percent of the children gained the necessary weight (400 grams or more) to graduate from PD/Hearth after 30 days. Severe malnutrition was reduced from the baseline of 27.4 percent to 8.0 percent after 90 days, and moderate malnutrition decreased from 50.1 percent to 34.7 percent.[166]

WVB argues that engaging community leaders to develop localized strategies and approaches has been a critical factor in their success and community-based model. Though a Christian organization, WVB recognizes the importance of engaging prominent and influential religious leaders of any faith tradition in each community where they operate. Bijoy Sarker, Nutrition Specialist at WVB, stresses the need to collaborate with religious leaders, because they are very influential in their communities and can be very powerful advocates: "This is a Muslim majority country and in fact 95 percent of our beneficiaries are Muslim. In many communities imams can really be catalysts for change. We engage them in our nutrition programs to spread important messages around nutrition during pregnancy and gender equality."[167]

4.3.2.2 Islamic Aid Bangladesh

Islamic Aid Bangladesh (IAB) was established in 1990 with a mission to "eliminate the curse of ignorance (illiteracy), hunger, poverty, ill health, and all other inhuman actions which affect the dignity of [the] human being."[168] It has been actively involved from the start in providing primary education, healthcare, interest-free capital support, water and sanitation, technical and vocational training, relief and rehabilitation, and livelihood support. IAB takes inspiration for its work from its Muslim faith, seeking to "gain divine pleasure and satisfaction of Allah through serving His creation and establish a society free from all sorts of injustice and discrimination."[169]

IAB works through a national network of 32 branch offices throughout Bangladesh, with a variety of development programs, roughly falling into two categories: regular and occasional programs. Regular programs include work in education, healthcare, orphan support, orphanage and mosque construction, and WASH, while emergency relief and rehabilitation, livelihood and income generation, Ramadan support, Qurbani meat distribution, and in-kind donation are occasional programs.

Health is a key focus, with several projects designed "to improve the health condition of poor and needy people, especially women and children both in rural and urban areas."[170]
IAB's strength is its strategy to extend health coverage to underserved areas through a mobile motor river launch clinic, an ambulance service, and a network of health centers and two large hospitals in Bagerhat and Ganapaddy. IAB runs 11 smaller health centers across Bangladesh, nine of which are located in rural areas and two in urban areas.[171] These health centers provide treatment and medication to the patients free of cost, serving 9,600 male patients, 10,810 female patients, and 12,044 children in 2011.

4.3.2.3 Lutheran Aid to Medicine Bangladesh (LAMB) Hospital

Lutheran Aid to Medicine in Bangladesh (LAMB) hospital, a 115 bed hospital in Dinjapur, Bangladesh, was founded in 1983 with a mission to "serve God through serving the poor or underprivileged, especially women and children."[172] Located in the rural northwest of Bangladesh, serving a population of nearly one million from the Dinjapur and Rangpur districts, LAMB "seeks to improve health through integrated community and hospital interventions focusing on the poorest patients."[173] The hospital is well known for its provision of clinical services to women and children, with maternity and pediatric wards and reproductive health programs.

The vision for LAMB goes back to the 1950s when a missionary of the American Santal Mission noted the lack of basic medical facilities for many rural communities in Bangladesh. Initially LAMB provided temporary clinics and healthcare training, but over the years its scope and resources have expanded to include hospital services, community clinics, a tuberculosis program, a disability rehabilitation and nutrition facility, a community health and development program, a large training center, an English medium school, management and information systems research program, and a nursing institute. [174] LAMB worked with local authorities to establish 28 health centers including 18 safe delivery units (SDUs), which are equipped to provide normal delivery care and referrals at the time of obstetric complications. These 18 SDUs include 60 skilled birth attendants (SBAs), 200 community health workers (CHWs), and 450 village health volunteers (VHVs) thereby covering a population of 550,000 from three different districts.[175]

Over the past thirty years LAMB has developed a highly regarded and emulated health infrastructure in Dinjapur that has contributed significantly to reducing maternal and infant deaths. LAMB's health extension strategy largely relies on local village health volunteers (VHVs), women selected by the community who are already informally involved in some kind of healthcare provision, to advocate for and encourage women in the community to seek health services when necessary. Each VHV is responsible for a group of 250 households, visiting households with new births within 48 hours of delivery, teaching women about the importance of breastfeeding, immunization, and family planning. [176] They are also trained to recognize and make proper referrals in the cases of sick newborns. CHWs are women who work in their own home community and receive six weeks of training in primary healthcare followed by four months of basic clinical training provided by LAMB. They are responsible for health education, maintenance of the maternity register and the register of children under 5 years, identification of children with disabilities, and supervision of VHVs.[177] SBAs are the next level of healthcare worker and receive a salary. Unlike VHVs and CHWs, SBAs have higher level of formal education and receive six months of training in postnatal and antenatal care, recognition of danger signs, provision of obstetric first aid, and neonatal care. They are licensed by the Bangladesh Nursing Council to practice within the community.

Encouraging greater community ownership over health resources, LAMB has invested significantly in capacity building for CMCs and has seen positive results for women and children. The percentage of births attended by SBAs in LAMB's core area of operation was 69 percent compared to a national percentage of 25 percent.[178] Likewise neonatal mortality in LAMB's core area was 21 per 1,000 compared to the national average of 32 per 1,000. A national survey of Bangladesh reported that women received post-partum care within 42 days of delivery but women in the LAMB project area received post-partum care within 48 hours of delivery. LAMB has built an effective strategy working "across a continuum of care, from households

to village level in local clinics, to tertiary care at the hospital," an approach that has not only proved effective but also one that could serve as a model countrywide.[179]

4.3.3 Peacebuilding

Some of the most pressing social concerns in Bangladesh today surround rising communal tensions, erupting sporadically into episodes of violence with causality rates and frequency unlike any violence since the country's bloody Liberation War. Much of the violence has its roots in politics, stemming from an increasingly bitter divide between Bangladesh's two main political parties, the BNP and the Awami League. Human Rights Watch has suggested that the January 2014 elections, which were boycotted by the BNP, were "the most violent in the country's history."[180] The one-year anniversary was likewise marred by *hartals* (strikes) and street violence, including fire-bombing of public buses. Hundreds were killed and injured in the violence, which persisted for months. Religious minorities and Hindus in particular have been targeted for attack with hundreds of homes burned and temples vandalized.

Despite the fact that much of this unrest could be termed 'political,' there are significant religious dimensions, notably the controversial role Islam plays in national identity. Political parties have often played off of the emotive connection many Bangladeshis feel towards religion, exploiting anger at what some view as Islam's marginalization by secular activists. Benedict Alo D'Rozario, Executive Director of Caritas Bangladesh, sees the violence as partially rooted in the attempts of political parties to use religion as a political tool: "Both political parties are using religious groups and religion as their basis for authority. That is the root of the problem."[181] The recent gruesome killings of secular and atheist bloggers by young Islamists have sparked alarm in international circles (see box 7); it calls attention to the dangerous and growing ideological rift between a secular-minded segment of society that looks to the West as the country modernizes and a segment of the country's Islamic community seen as becoming increasingly radical. Though a recent spark has been the trials of Muslim leaders during the International Crimes Tribunal trials that led to the Shahbag protests, the divide has deep roots, which have been explored previously in this report.

Several of Bangladesh's FIOs, particularly those rooted in minority faith traditions, have been actively engaged in the promotion of religious pluralism and building interfaith understanding long before these recent upheavals. The work of Ramakrishna Mission goes back more than a century to Swami Vivekananda who is held up by many as the pioneer of the modern interfaith movement. Other efforts, such as the work of the Catholic Church, are more recent developments. All of the efforts however, are relatively limited in scope and scale given the immense challenges surrounding peacebuilding in Bangladesh given rising social tensions. The following profiles point to established efforts by respected organizations with potential to be scaled up with adequate support.

4.3.3.1 Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna Mission (RM) is a society of Hindu monks founded by Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) and named for his guru, the nineteenth century Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna took a universalist outlook, declaring all religions to be true and valid means towards the same goal. When Sri Ramakrishna died in 1886, Swami Vivekananda was his principle disciple and heir to his spiritual powers.[182] He was one of the first Hindu swamis to become well known in the West, representing Hinduism at the first major international gathering of religious leaders, the 1893 "Parliament of Religions" in Chicago. He had a powerful impact on the gathering, disseminating Ramakrishna's message that, as interpreted by Swami Sthiratmananda, assistant secretary of Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka, "all the rivers mingle in the same sea and all the religions go towards the same God. Therefore we can say all religions are true, the methods are different but the goal is the same."[183]

RM was founded in 1897 to realize Sri Ramakrishna's vision of faith-inspired service to humanity. According to Swami Sthiratmananda, "Sri Ramakrishna thought that the world's religions had become limited and confined, and he wanted to draw attention to the potential divinity in all people and show how this could be manifested through every action and thought…by following one's own religion one can serve the masses from the essence of religion, because God dwells in everybody's heart, so service to human beings is service to God."[184] There are now 178 RM centers globally. RM came to what is now Bangladesh in 1899 after Swami Vivekananda was asked to give lectures at Jagannath University and Jagannath College[185] and now has 13 centers in Bangladesh.

A major focus of this multi-faith institution is character building and spiritual development with particular attention to interfaith dialogue in Bangladesh. RM hosts several "Interfaith Meets" throughout the year commemorating the births of Sri Ramakrishna, his wife Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, which often draw hundreds of attendees. These events bring together faith leaders and scholars to explore some of the guiding ideals in their religions with the goal of contributing to better understandings within and between faith traditions. Swami Sthiratmananda observes, "We can give an example of service to humanity, which is also in Islam and also in Christianity. People become impressed that all the religions strive to do good, so hatred goes away and harmony comes. We work in the spirit of religious harmony and peace, staying at peace side by side, following one's own religion and giving respect to others."[186] Ramakrishna Mission's Dhaka headquarters recently hosted a special program of interfaith dialogue in January 2014 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda.

4.3.3.2 Mennonite Central Committee

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a relief and development arm of the Mennonite church, was founded in 1920 to "share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice."[187] Conflict transformation and peace building have been a central focus of MCC's work from the outset and the Mennonites are known as one of the most important "peace churches" globally because of their strong commitment to pacifism and social justice. Starting with the work of MCC's Peace Section, which later became the Mennonite Conciliation Service, the Mennonites have played central roles in responding to some of the most violent and entrenched conflicts of the twentieth century including in Somalia, Liberia, Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Israel-Palestine. MCC first began working in Bangladesh in 1970 after Cyclone Bhola. MCC initially focused on emergency assistance, gradually expanding into wide-ranging programs in agriculture, employment generation, education, health, and peace building.

In 2007 MCC launched Shanti Mitra or "Friends of Peace" in partnership with Brothers of Taizé, an ecumenical monastic order based in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France. Much like the Mennonites, the Taizé Brothers are devoted to the ideals of kindness, simplicity, and reconciliation. The project in Bangladesh is mainly volunteer-based and headquartered at Shanti Nir, "The House of Peace" in Mymensingh District. Members are young and comprise a range of faith traditions and ethnic groups. Shanti Mitra Sangha gathers once a month to reflect on various peace-related topics and plan future projects. The meetings involve group meditation and readings from different religious traditions.

MCC also works to integrate peacebuilding and conflict transformation strategies into the daily lives of people across the country by facilitating workshops and classes for students and employees of local NGOs. They organize events in the community that are focused on peace and justice, and work to translate and create original peacebuilding literature in the Bengali language.

4.4.4.3 Caritas Bangladesh

Caritas Bangladesh began work as Caritas East Pakistan in 1967 as the relief and development wing of the Catholic Church. After Cyclone Bhola devastated the region in 1970, Caritas East Pakistan was reorganized as Christian Organization for Relief and Rehabilitation (CORR) and became key players in relief and rehabilitation efforts. The organization name changed to Caritas Bangladesh in 1976. The organization is now one of the five largest NGOs in Bangladesh with over 80 projects in four main areas:

1. Education, including running technical training centers and pre-primary and primary schools.

2. Social justice and human rights, including programs that work on justice and peace, micro-finance, and youth and community development

3. Healthcare, including programs that target the elderly and disabled, those suffering from leprosy and tuberculosis, as well as pregnant and new mothers and their children

4. Sustainable livelihood and disaster management, including combating climate change through adaptation and risk reduction, to bolster sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

Caritas, and the Catholic Church more broadly, have been involved in peace work in Bangladesh since Holy Cross Father Richard "Dick" Timm's pioneering work forming the Justice and Peace Commission in the aftermath of the Liberation War. That program sought to build capacity within the Catholic and development communities to support reconciliation efforts placing particular emphasis on outreach to Bangladesh's Muslim religious leaders. Holy Cross Brother Jarlath D'Souza's work with the Bangladesh Inter-religious Council for Peace and Justice, which has been hosting monthly meetings since 1971, is another noteworthy example.

Building from this established peace and justice work, Caritas has made this a focal issue in Bangladesh. The Justice and Peace Program (JPP), which began in 2002, is at the core of this programming and in its fourth phase. The program aims to promote peace and reconciliation in situations of violent conflict, providing human rights education for faith leaders from different faith communities and assisting victims of injustice in acquiring legal support. The program works with community leaders to develop alternative mechanisms for local dispute resolution and has reached about 4,000 male and 2,500 female participants, covering 623 villages of 93 upazilas in 52 districts. Through workshops that target youth and teachers from various faith communities, Caritas's peacebuilding programs seek to "create an opportunity for inter-religious dialogue," with the goal of strengthening mutual understanding.[188]

Caritas has also looked to support peacebuilding efforts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts between indigenous and settler communities, supporting day-long "peace and harmony" fairs. These fairs, designed "to build the unity and brotherhood between ethnic and Bengali communities," have brought together hundreds of people of all ages from both the indigenous and Bengali ethnic communities to participate in several sports and cultural events.[189]

Caritas's annual Lenten Campaign, also known as the "Sacrifice and Service" campaign, is yet another program that seeks to build peaceful relations through greater interfaith understanding in Bangladesh. Through a series or workshops and seminars, the program looks to inspire those of all faiths to unite in service to the poor and vulnerable. Each year the program is centered on a particular theme. Caritas solicits written reflections on the year's theme from leaders of each of Bangladesh's major faith traditions: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian. These reflections are complied in an annual publication to draw attention to shared values and shared purpose among Bangladesh's faith communities.

4.3.4 Education

Deficiencies in Bangladesh's education system have long presented a barrier to development efforts in everything from economic growth to women's empowerment. Even in 2015, 96 percent of the labor force has not completed secondary schooling and two-thirds have not completed primary schooling.[190] However, access and equity have both expanded significantly over the past two decades in Bangladesh. Additional noteworthy accomplishments in the sector include achieving near universal access to primary education and gender equity at the primary and secondary levels. The ratio of girls to boys in primary school has risen from 0.83 in 1990 to 1.02 in 2011, and in secondary school from 0.52 to 1.13.[191] This change has been driven primarily by gender-focused public interventions, including stipends or exemption from school fees for girls, particularly in rural areas, as well as expansions in the number of private NGOs and religious schools.

While gains in the education sector are encouraging, significant challenges remain. First, the issue of quality is a concern, with only a third of primary school students in Bangladesh possessing expected numeracy and literacy skills upon graduation.[192] While enrollment inequity between poor and non-poor children, particularly at the primary level, has been reduced, the secondary gross enrollment ratio for poor children, 45 percent, is low compared to 76 percent for non-poor children.[193] While the gender gap has been closed at the primary and secondary levels, it remains wide at the tertiary level where there are still only 66 women for every 100 men enrolled.[194] The gender gap at the tertiary level of education is problematic because it limits women's economic potential. Without a university degree, women are less competitive for salaried, middle-class positions, and are thus often restricted to hourly wage-based jobs and informal work. Finally, approximately 5 million children are not enrolled in school, having either never attended or dropped out prematurely largely because they were compelled to work by their economic conditions.

A principle reason Bangladesh has been able to make such strides in education is due to innovative public-private partnerships and subsidies. The system is large and complex, serving around 30 million students and involving 13 types of school

providers with 10 examination boards,.[195] Education is overseen by two government ministries, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), responsible for primary and non-formal education, as well as literacy, and the Ministry of Education (MoE), which is responsible for secondary, tertiary, technical, and vocational education and madrasa education. While many primary schools have been nationalized and are now government-run, roughly 98 percent of secondary institutions remain private. Religious institutions constitute a large proportion of these private providers. In 2011, NGO-operated schools number 41 at the primary level and 18,753 at the secondary level while the number of madrasas alone was estimated at 9,327.[196]

Without question, the education sector is where faith-inspired contributions are most visible and numerous. Education has been a core concern for virtually every major faith tradition present in Bangladesh and religious actors long served as the primary providers of education, particular to poor and marginalized groups, prior to the advent of public education. The contributions of faith groups are vast and varied, while some faith-inspired providers, such as the orthodox Islamic Quomi madrasa system, have seen calls for reform, other Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian schools have earned reputations as some of the country's finest. Catholic schools in particular have long been known for the high quality of education they provide in Bangladesh and cannot be overlooked. An estimated 600 Catholic educational institutions in Bangladesh serve approximately 143,500 students, 90 percent of whom are non-Catholic.[197] These schools are overseen by a Catholic Education Board. A 2008 study found that students at Catholic schools had a 96 percent pass rate for the Secondary School Certificate exam compared with the national average of 70 percent.[198] The Catholic community also has a growing presence in tertiary education. Notre Dame University in Dhaka, officially founded as Notre Dame College in 1949, was formalized as a university in 2013. It offers coursework in English, economics, law, philosophy, and business administration.

4.3.4.1 The Madrasa system in Bangladesh

Madrasas have a large and growing presence in primary and secondary education in Bangladesh.[199] In 2009, madrasas accounted for an estimated 13.8 percent of school enrollment at the primary level and about 21 percent of secondary enrollment (see figures 11 and 12).[200]

Madrasas have been part of public education in the Indian subcontinent since the twelfth century. Informal and decentralized educational resources, they used localized curricula and pedagogical methods that consisted mainly of rote memorization. In an attempt to reform and modernize madrasas in Bengal, the British created a quasi-public madrasa system called 'Alia which introduced humanities and sciences alongside an abbreviated *Dars-i-Nizami* curriculum. These

madrasas were government funded and centrally managed by a Madrasa Education Board. As government-managed madrasas with curricula spanning religious and secular topics, they were historically, and are still considered today, a unique entity in the Muslim world. Because of the strong ties with many madrasas in Pakistan and the privileged position of Urdu in madrasas, they were accused of providing material and ideological support to Pakistan during the Liberation War. After independence madrasas were therefore targeted for reform; the government created the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board in 1978 to oversee the curricula in 'Alia madrasas.[201]Deobandi madrasas known locally as Quomi fall outside of this regulation, and have seen increasing calls for reform, which have been strongly resisted by the Orthodox Muslim community. The government has expressed hesitancy to approach Quomi madrasa reform in part due to fear over the potential unrest it may cause.

Present day 'Alia madrasas offer primary and secondary education with a full secular curriculum in addition to Islamic subjects. The government-appointed Madrasa Education Board sets the secular curriculum for 'Alia madrasas, which conforms to the national curriculum at government-run primary schools.[202] Approximately 14,700 'Alia madrasas are currently operating in Bangladesh, which comprise about 10 percent of all primary school enrollment and about 20 percent of secondary school enrollment.[203]

Quomi madrasas are for the most part rooted in the orthodox Deobandi tradition that stretches across India and Pakistan. They take religious instruction as their primary focus, utilizing the *Dars-i-Nizami* 20-subject curriculum, often with no secular subjects taught, though this can vary greatly between madrasas. Quomi madrasas are not required to register with the Madrasa Education Board, having their own regulating board and do not receive government funding. They are fully private institutions, funded through religious donations (zakat), foreign Islamic NGO support, and parental contributions. Many have boarding available for disadvantaged children.

The Befaqul Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh is the largest Quomi madrasa education board. Founded in 1978, the Board claims to represent more than 15,000 Quomi madrasas in Bangladesh reaching 1.85 million students. It has been difficult to validate any claims as to the number of Quomi madrasas or students as these schools do not register with any government entity and they have been the subject of very little external research. One independent study estimated that in 2009, Quomi madrasas accounted for about 2 percent of primary and secondary school enrollment.[204]

Figure 11. Distribution of primary school enrollment by type
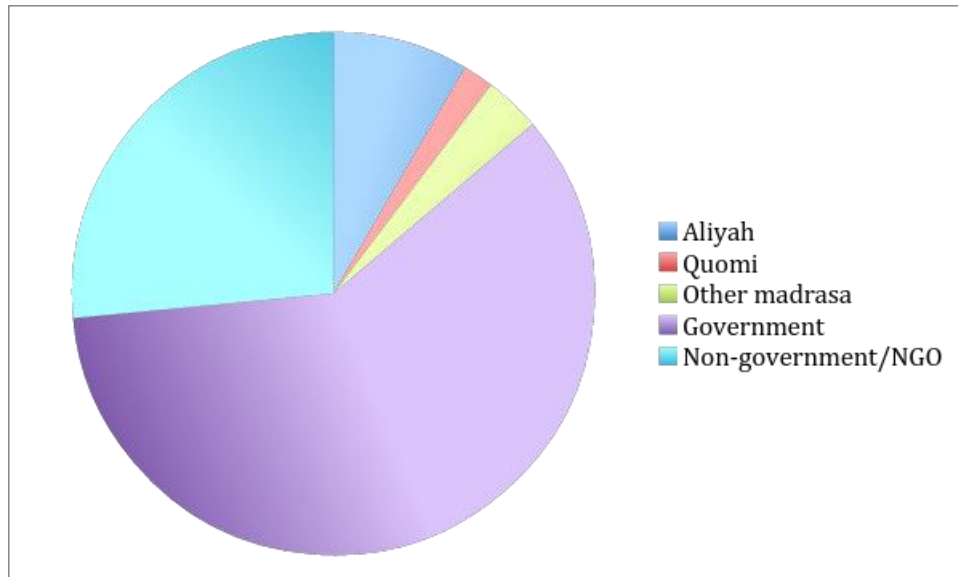
Figure 12. Distribution of secondary school enrollment by type
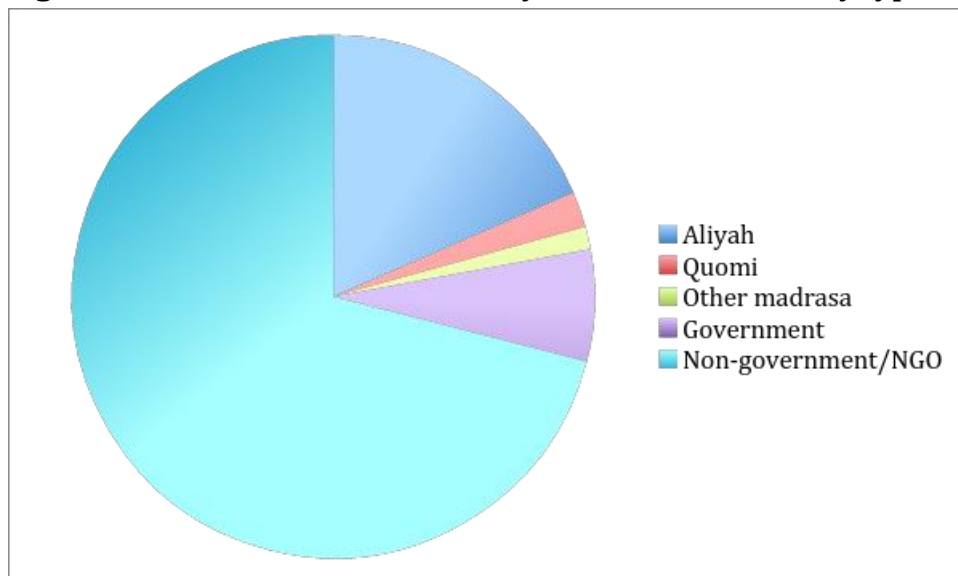
Source: Asadullah, Chaudhury, and Josh 2009

Madrasas and school choice

Studies of the determinants of school selection in Bangladesh have found that families with higher levels of religiosity did not have an innate preference to enroll children in a madrasa. The study suggests that poorer families, and those that have difficulty accessing public schools, enroll a larger proportion of their children in madrasas.[205] Overall, students and staff at madrasas have positive views of the madrasa education, but have concerns about teacher qualification and preparation and the lack of updated facilities.[206]

For many poor students, education in a Quomi madrasa in fact serves to marginalize them further. The academic standards of Quomi madrasas are commonly perceived as being below the standards of other schools, and graduates have a more difficult time finding gainful employment and leading a productive economic life because Quomi madrasas do not follow the government curriculum. Furthermore, the degrees that they issue are not recognized by the state.

Gender and madrasa education

Because of the unique pseudo-public nature of 'Alia madrasas, which allows the government to regulate school admissions and curriculum policies,[207] the path to reform is more straightforward than in Quomi madrasas and consequently opportunities have widened for female students over the past two decades. Historically most madrasas were all-male, and up to the early 1990s overall enrolment levels for girls were low: female enrollment was just 7.7 percent of total madrasa enrollment in secondary schools, for example.[208] In 1994, the government introduced the Female Secondary School Stipend Program, which provided financial incentives for 'Alia madrasas to admit female students. The incentive system proved a success and as of 2008, roughly half of enrolled students in secondary madrasas were girls.[209] The government also introduced policies to promote the employment of female teachers in 'Alia madrasas. [210] One study of madrasa student attitudes noted that "female teachers serve as a powerful model for girls in matters such as further education, labor for participation, and work."[211]

The expansion of the madrasa sector has played an important role in Bangladesh's exceptional progress in closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education.[212] Madrasas have contributed to efforts to expand girls' access to education because they are able to reach rural, isolated areas and often serve the poor.[213] Social norms restrict girls' movements outside of the home in rural Bangladesh, so the availability of madrasas in such rural areas makes it more likely that girls will attend school.

Access to education has the potential to empower girls, but perspectives on if or how such educational access changes social norms vary across Bangladesh. According to some, rising enrollment of girls in secondary school madrasas has "helped relax social constraints on women's mobility, particularly in regions which are culturally 'conservative,'" suggesting that attending madrasas not only helps to close the gender gap in school enrollment, but is also having wider societal impacts for women's empowerment.[214] Others suggest madrasas may inculcate students with more conservative social values that emphasize traditional gender roles. A survey of female madrasa students found less favorable opinions on higher education for girls and female economic activities, as well as preference for larger families, compared to students at government schools.[215] Such values may be part of a broader trend of "a growing conservatism visible amongst madrasa graduates in relation to women's roles, supporting a traditional patriarchal social structure where boys are preferred

and supported both for higher education and employment, while girls play a home-making role."[216] An ethnographic study of a madrasa in a rural village in Bangladesh found that education for girls, including basic literacy and numeracy, is valued even within this framework of more conservative social values; however most see these skills as primarily contributing to competence as wives, mothers, and heads-of-household.[217]

Box 15. Quomi madrasas and radicalization

Orthodox madrasas are viewed in some quarters as one pipeline into terrorist groups, but such claims rest on limited evidence. A survey of those with tertiary level Islamic education explored the links between madrasa education and extremist views, finding that those with militant links were rarely associated with Quomi madrasas; rather, most had 'Alia or public education backgrounds. Given the increase in political violence in recent years, it is noteworthy that the study also found Quomi students were often apolitical as compared to 'Alia students, many of whom were engaged across the political spectrum. The study did suggest that most Quomi students (68 percent) held negative views of the US, but despite this, a majority (60 percent) disapproved of jihad against the U.S.[218] Other studies have shown that attitudes of religious tolerance are widespread in Bangladeshi madrasas. In a knowledge and attitudes survey of madrasa teachers and students, 99 percent of respondents felt the need to build bridges of understanding and co-existence between the different religious communities.[219]
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4.3.4.4 Haqqani Mission Bangladesh

Haqqani Mission Bangladesh is a Sufi-inspired organization, whose work grew out of the teachings of two Sufi saints (*pirs*), Hazrat Abu Ali Akter Uddin and Sufi Khwaja Anwarul Huq, founders of the Haqqani religious movement. Social welfare work started informally in 1959 and the Haqqani Mission officially registered as an NGO in 1990 and the founder president is S K Abdul Hanif, becoming one of the first Sufi movements in Bangladesh to formalize their social work.[220] The ultimate aim of Haqqani Mission Bangladesh is to build a lasting peace in Bangladeshi society, which they aim to achieve by incorporating spiritual development into their education and social welfare programs.[221] They believe that the delinking of moral and economic development in modern Bangladesh has led to a range of social ills including religious extremism and corruption. Professor Muhammad Mezbah-ul-Islam, Executive President of Haqqani Mission, observed: "Our ultimate goal is to build up a peaceful society and counter some of the misinterpretations of religion in Bangladesh. If you work for humanity you will build a peaceful society. Islam means peace so that is what we are working towards."[222] The word Haqqani comes from the Arabic word *huq*, or truth, and denotes the organization's emphasis on advancing the proper interpretation of Islam through a range of research and

publication efforts. Haqqani Mission is also a strong advocate in efforts to boost capacity in Sufi scholarship in Bangladesh.

Though many Sufi communities in Bangladesh are socially engaged to varying degrees, Haqqani Mission, while small, has the most formalized development efforts. Even so, it does not run with fulltime staff as most NGOs in Bangladesh do; rather, every staff member works for Haqqani Mission on a voluntary basis—that is, each individual has a full time job, and works for the organization in their free time. This is central to the model as Dr. Mezbah-ul-Islam explains: "each person has a spiritual and a professional track in their lives… So our Haqqani Mission has a philosophy to work for yourself first, and build confidence and expertise; then you can work more effectively for others."

Haqqani Mission is focused around two streams of work: the organization's spiritual and religious work, and its social welfare programs. Haqqani Mission's primary focus is on formal and religious education, but the organization also runs several other small-scale development programs including a credit and savings cooperative, a welfare fund to distribute resources to the poor, a relief mission during periods of natural disasters, and mobile healthcare clinics.

Support for Sufi scholarship and teaching is at the heart of Haqqani Mission's spiritual development, based on the Sufi emphasis on divine love and the individual's relationship with the creator. Their Spiritual Training and Practice Centres provide education on religious Sufi beliefs and practices, and they are working to found an institute of theology to provide a space for the study of Sufi Islam as well as other religions. A Qur'an Research Institute and Discussion Centre was founded in 1993. An important part of the Centre's mission is to oppose fundamentalism by providing teaching on Sufi values and texts. The Centre also works to share messages about the importance of human development and welfare and fostering peace. Haqqani Mission publishes a weekly newspaper, "Bartaman Sanglap," and instructional religious books to spread their message.

Haqqani Mission also works to provide formal and vocational education to underserved communities through a small but growing network of schools at the primary, secondary, and university level. It provides scholarships for meritorious and poor students. For vocational programming, Haqqani Mission hosts the HAMIBA Computer Academy to provide technical IT training to youth and an adult literacy program. They are developing a center to provide skills training in embroidery, sewing, and handicrafts to poor women.[223]

4.3.4.5 Dhaka Ahsania Mission

Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) was founded in 1958 by Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, an important education and social reformer and devout Sufi. Ahsanullah was the

first non-British member of the Indian Education Service. A major focus of Asanullah's reforms was extending education to rural and marginalized communities and ending communal favoritism. He also played an active role in the establishment of Dhaka University. DAM is a Sufi-inspired organization that focuses on inwardly-focused spiritual development as well as divine service. The organization's founding aims include:

● Developing the spiritual and social life of humanity;
● Cultivating unity and inspiring divine love;
● Enabling individuals to recognize their relationship and duty to the Creator as well as to fellow human beings; and
● Rendering help to the suffering of humanity.[224]

DAM's early work in the 1960s and '70s included adult education programs, Qu'ran classes, and skills training courses to support poverty reduction. The 1990s saw the establishment of Khanbahadur Ahsanullah Teacher's Training College and Asanullah University of Science and Technology, both the first of their kind in Bangladesh. DAM's work has since rapidly expanded to encompass a variety of wide-ranging development sectors and services, including microfinance, sanitation and hygiene, disaster risk reduction, climate change, and livelihoods. As of 2013, DAM had 144 field offices and programmatic coverage in 49 districts and 172 *upazilas*, and employed more than 7,000 staff. Its field programs reached more than 5.7 million participants in FY 2012-13 through 71 different programs.[225] Continuing the mission of its founder, education remains one of DAM's focal priorities.

Today, DAM runs a wide variety of education programs, from early childhood education to adult literacy, and skills training and teaching colleges. The Children's Learning Centers (DAM-CLC) is a flagship education program, run in partnership with the European Commission. More than 1,900 CLCs are located in 26 districts in Noakhali, Chittagong, and Mymensingh, primarily in rural areas. The project aims to provide access to primary education for 40,000 students throughout over five years. DAM chooses school locations based on the greatest need for primary education and specifically targets children that have been left out of mainstream school system. In order to be eligible, students must have never attended or have dropped out of mainstream schools, and DAM aims to ensure that 60 percent of enrolled students are girls. To accommodate students of varying ages who may have been out of school for some DAM utilizes a unique multi-grade classroom approach; one teacher works with children across different ages and levels in a single classroom. Children are split into small groups based on their progress so students can be accelerated or provided extra support as needed. Teachers receive pedagogic support from a technical officer based in an area office, as well as monthly refresher training sessions.[226]

DAM also selects and trains the 1,000 teachers and 159 staff members who supervise and run the project from 13 area offices. Each CLC receives five years of funding from 2012 to 2017; DAM then plans to turn over management to the center management committees (CMC) whose members come from the community and who are in charge of the day-to-day operations of the CLCs.[227]

Throughout DAM's history faith has been an important motivating factor, and indeed it is the largest and most influential Sufi-inspired NGO in Bangladesh. The Sufi concept of divine love serves as a central inspiration for their service. Executive Director of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Dr. Ehsanur Rahman, argues that the Sufi belief that Allah created humanity out of love and that it is love that binds the creator and all of humanity together is central to DAM's holistic approach.[228] The organization's motto is "Divine and Humanitarian Service," well-illustrates their goal of developing the spiritual and social life of the entire community. Inter-religious harmony is also a focus of the organization, as Dr. Rahman observes: Sufis believe that although the rituals of different religious groups vary, the values that undergird faith groups around the world are the same. Although DAM's work is faith-inspired, their programs and activities are never mosque-based, a strategy that has helped them to provide services to communities of all faith backgrounds.

4.3.4.6 Moanoghar and Banophool Adibashi Green Heart College

Moanoghar and Banophool Adibashi Green Heart College provide primary and secondary level education to underprivileged indigenous and Bengali youth. Both schools were established by Venerable Prajnananda Mahathera, a Theravada Buddhist monk from the Chakma indigenous community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Growing up an orphan himself, Mahathera received support to complete his Secondary exams from an orphanage and school run by a group of engaged Buddhist monks called Parbatya Chattal Boudha Anath Ashram in the mid-1960s. This support eventually allowed him to pursue university education and found Moanoghar and Banophool Adibashi Green Heart College to continue the mission of Parbatya Chattal Boudha Anath Ashram, by providing support to those displaced by the damming project that created Kaptai Lake.

In 1974, Parbatya Chattal Boudha Anath Ashram gave Mahathera the resources to found a branch of the Ashram in Rangamati, one of the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Taking inspiration from the Buddhist ideals of nonviolent harmony (*sila*) and loving-kindness (*metta*) this new institution aimed to be "an ideal refuge for distressed humanity." This refuge would prove critically important to youth in the CHT. Just three years after its founding, the region descended into civil war and a protracted insurgency raged for nearly two decades.

The school, which in 1980 became known as Moanoghar, began with only 35 students and has expanded significantly. Bringing together students from all of the region's diverse ethnic communities, Moanoghar aims to serve as a model of social harmony and coexistence. Their ultimate goal is to bring about "a society in which the disadvantaged and marginalized communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts have access to the basic services necessary to give them a secure future and in which the various cultural traditions of its people can be shared and cherished."[229] Moanoghar currently has more than 1,400 students enrolled in primary, secondary, and technical vocational school. About 620 children come from remote villages and receive housing in the school's hostels, and the rest come from neighboring villages. All students receive free or highly subsidized education. Moanoghar also runs a community clinic as well as a variety of other social welfare programs for the community.[230]

Mahathera notes that the idea behind founding a school located in Dhaka "was to bring indigenous students to Dhaka after class five to provide a good foundation in English and also offer them access to better job and higher education opportunities."[231] The proposal received funding from the European Union and other donors and the school was founded in 1990. Mahathera spent many years traveling between the CHT and Dhaka to manage both schools, but in 2008 he moved to Dhaka to run the College full time. Banophool now has almost 2,000 students ranging from the equivalent of kindergarten to twelfth grade. About 120 of the students are from indigenous communities in the CHT and board at the school. The 110 teachers teach in both English and Bengali. All of the teachers have post-graduate degrees, and the school has a reputation for high academic standards.

Thousands of students have received their Higher Secondary School Certificates from Moanoghar and Banophool. Mahathera notes that many graduates "are now working in Dhaka as teachers, doctors, engineers, and even magistrates…We even have graduates working in some of the top posts in the UN. Many have taken degrees from the Bangladesh Public Service Commission and are working to improve their country."[232]

In addition to their education and social programs, Moanoghar has also become a vibrant center for the preservation and celebration of the region's indigenous cultures that have endured countless attempts at linguistic and cultural assimilation. As an example, at present Bangladesh's public schools do not offer any indigenous language as a medium of instruction, even in indigenous majority communities. Moanoghar currently offers instruction in five indigenous languages with plans to introduce more. They also teach the Chakma alphabet as well as reading and writing, and print educational material in the language, work they hope to expand into other indigenous languages for the purpose of preservation. The school hosts a number of "cultural troupes," which promote the practice of traditional music, dance, and

crafts. Several famous Bangladeshi artists, including the painters Suniti Jiban Chakma and Dana Moni Chakma and singer J.C. Chakma graduated from Moanghar.

The reputation of both Moanoghar and Banophool Adibashi Green Heart College for academic excellence has grown steadily. Both provide services to underprivileged children regardless of faith. About 90 percent of the more than 2,000 students at Banophool are Muslim; only about 150 are Buddhist. Mahathera notes that while the local community was suspicious when the school was founded "things are getting better now. They understand that we are giving education to their children. Here Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists are united. We are all neighbors."[233]

4.3.5 Environment, Climate Change, and Disaster Response

Due to its low-lying coastal areas and floodplains combined with its dense population, Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the effects of climate change. The country experienced more than 70 major natural disasters between 2000 and 2009 directly affecting more than 30 million people.[234]

The Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove located on Bangladesh's southern coastline with the Bay of Bengal, is threatened by rising sea levels and deforestation. The forest provides a crucial 'bio-shield' for the agricultural communities along the coastline against tidal surges and protects against coastal erosion. Agricultural encroachment and rising water temperatures have also threatened local flora and fauna, including the endangered Bengal tiger. According to a report by Transparency International, Sundarbans "is highly vulnerable to illegal logging" which "takes place with impunity, involving the collusion of business syndicates, corrupt forest officials, and the local administration."[235]

About a third of Bangladeshis—35.1 million people—live in Bangladesh's coastal zone and are increasingly affected by rising sea levels. Already, groundwater has become salinated up to 100 km inland due to sea level rise.[236] This has had a significant impact on food security: wheat production is projected to decline by about 61 percent and rice production by 17 percent.[237] The government has been active in its response to the threats posed by climate change, enacting the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in 2009 and establishing the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCT) and the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF) in coordination with international donors and the World Bank. The BCCT and BCCRF have disbursed about $200 million in grant funds to government agencies and NGOs for projects related to climate mitigation, adaptation, and disaster resilience.

Undoubtedly the increasing availability of funds for climate change mitigation and adaptation has compelled many NGOs--including FIOs--to take up the environmental cause. Nonetheless many FIOs have developed innovative approaches, becoming

national leaders on the issue. Many have mainstreamed climate change adaptation across all of their programs. Unlike some issues, including women's empowerment and good governance, climate change is also viewed by many faith groups as a 'safe' issue for advocacy at the national level. Many FIOs participated actively in the development of The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, as well as the BCCT and the BCCRF. The following profiles are some of the more unique ways FIOs are respond to the challenge of climate change.

4.3.5.1 Church of Bangladesh and the Eco-Bishop Initiative

The Church of Bangladesh Social Development Programme (CBSDP), the development wing of the Church of Bangladesh, aims to "show Christ's love to the poor and marginalized irrespective of religion, cast, or creed."[238] It has 16 field-based offices, operating primarily in rural areas, as well as urban slums in Dhaka, Barisal, and Faridpur.[239] The Church of Bangladesh's social programming began in 1971 during the reconstruction period that followed the Liberation War, but programs began to expand rapidly under the tenure of the first Bengali Bishop, B.D. Mondal, in 1975: Bishop Paul Sarker observes that "[Bishop Mondal] was very interested in social development, and he started one children's program after another, social development programs, and more clinics and health programs…. He tried to do something not just for the Christians, but for our neighbors as well. This social development work has grown increasingly since then."[240]

CBSDP was officially registered with the government in 1979. As with many NGOs in Bangladesh, CBSDP's work began with humanitarian assistance after the Bhola cyclone and Liberation War and their work has since expanded to encompass several key focal areas:

- Food and livelihood security
- Community health and hygiene
- Developing local community groups
- Rights and social security
- Gender equity development
- Ethnic community development
- Climate change and disaster risk management

CBSDP's field offices are based where the Church has an active presence and provides a base for CBSDP's operations. CBSDP programs are strongly community-focused, and rely on the participation and support of community members.[241]

CBSDP's focus on climate change and the environment is rooted in the Church's teachings about the relationship between God and creation. Michael Roy, Asia Facilitator at the Anglican Alliance, which works to build capacity in the Anglican Church's development organizations around the world, explains that "We are

created by God at the same time and in the same way that nature is created by God. Thus we have some responsibility to work to help humanity survive, but at the same time help the planet to survive."[242]

Church of Bangladesh Bishop Paul Sarker is one of 16 Anglican Bishops around the world who participates in the Anglican Church's Eco-Bishop's Initiative, an ongoing dialogue that brings together Bishops from countries and communities hardest hit by the impacts of climate change to discuss how efforts to address climate change could be effectively replicated in other communities. Discussions within the initiative have been facilitated by the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN). Canon Ken Gray, Secretary to the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, reports that the Bishops are bound together by "a shared sense of urgency around the Church's stewardship of creation and the importance of the fifth Mark of Mission, 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'"[243] Outcomes of the Bishop's first initiative include a commitment to develop and distribute liturgical materials on Care for Creation in parishes, a review of churches' investment practices with regard to environmental sustainability, the integration of issues of environmental justice into the curricula of Anglican educational institutions, and calling upon political, economic, social, and religious leaders to "address the climate crisis as the most urgent moral issue of our day."[244]

The Church of Bangladesh and CBSDP have a central focus on climate change adaptation, particularly strengthening the resilience of small scale farmers to climate related shocks. In discussions with WFDD, Church of Bangladesh and CBSDP officials revealed that they plan to identify two communities in which to document both ongoing impacts of climate change and local responses. This knowledge base would be shared in meeting with the Eco-Bishops Initiative to compare experiences and build from lessons learned across contexts.

4.3.5.2 Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh: Climate Solution Center

Disaster risk reduction has been a core programmatic focus of the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) since it began life as Bangladesh Ecumenical Relief and Rehabilitation Services (BERRS) following Cyclone Bhola in 1970. However, in recent years the immediacy and intensity of challenges surrounding climate change in Bangladesh have pushed this focus in new directions. As CCDB Executive director Joyanta Adhikari observes, climate change issues were unavoidable in conversations about focal priorities for the organization in the face of funding concerns since the 2007 financial crisis: "We have started to assess our current activities and prioritize which areas should receive the most focus and climate and environmental issues came up. These issues have major implications for the future of the country. Really the entire population in being affected."[245]

As the communities in which CCDB operates increasingly feel the impacts of climate change in everything from agricultural and maritime livelihoods to water and sanitation, CCDB has made mainstreaming climate concerns central pillar of its countrywide strategy. This new focus is aimed at increasing organizational competence and staff knowledge on the issue, but also at addressing the knowledge and capacity gap around climate change mitigation and adaptation in Bangladeshi civil society more broadly. Taking inspiration from notions of environmental stewardship rooted in biblical teachings, the organization sees itself well positioned to take on a more visible and active role nationally on climate change, utilizing its extensive grassroots network and well-respected position in civil society. Their ultimate goal is to spur innovative approaches to climate change adaptation and build resilient communities at the grassroots level, using these insights to inform national-level policy discussions on the topic.

As part of a three-year effort began in 2015, supported by Bread for the World Germany, CCDB is working to establish a Climate Unit within the organization that will work to build capacity through trainings for CCDB staff as well as those from other organizations, conduct research around local-level climate change adaptation, and develop advocacy tools for use at the national level. CCDB's climate unit will have three main thematic foci: climate change adaptation in agriculture, household level climate change impacts, and renewable energy. A central concern of CCDB's climate work will be to gain a better understanding of the gender dimensions of climate change and responding to the unique impacts on women.

Perhaps most notably, CCDB's current climate initiative will include the establishment of a CCDB 'Climate Solution Center' in _____. The center will focus on 'action-oriented' research around climate change adaptation, serving as an open air laboratory to test strategies and approaches in a variety of areas. Examples of research to be undertaken include developing new crop varieties using indigenous cultivars, testing novel cropping patterns, exploring new types of well construction and rainwater harvesting systems as well as storm resistant home construction. The center would develop and dissemination innovative approaches in climate change adaptation and host trainings and planning sessions.

4.4 Networking, Coordination, and Information Sharing Platforms

Given the sheer number of development actors operating in Bangladesh and the complex set of government committees and agencies that regulate them, coordination and information sharing has been a serious and long-running concern. Which group FIOs belong to and what role they take varies greatly from organization to organization, but the need for coordination is particularly acute in Bangladesh given its susceptibility to natural disasters and the effects of climate change. Coordinating timely and effective humanitarian responses to periodic crises has been an obvious need. The past decade has seen the proliferation of networking

platforms, coordinating groups, and apex bodies. Though these have offered some real and tangible benefits in coordination in some cases, they have also made the situation more complex, with a multitude of forums with varying membership operating at different levels and in different sectors. By and large international FIOs are most active in networking platforms, as are some of the larger national FIOs such as Caritas, CCDB, and Ahsania Mission.

The INGO Forum is one of the main networking platforms in Bangladesh, and it includes several of the major faith-inspired INGOs such as World Vision and Islamic Relief. Bangladesh adopted the UN cluster approach to humanitarian coordination after Cyclone Sidr in 2007. The goal was to contribute to better collaborative planning for response, development of best practice, and involvement of key stakeholders in national policy dialogue. The cluster system covered everything from prevention and mitigation to response and recovery and reconstruction. There are several subclusters, including health, nutrition, WASH, education etc., each headed by the relevant UN entity. Some of the larger FIOs play important roles in these clusters.

Most local and national NGOs make use of different platforms for networking and capacity building. The Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) was formed in 1974, in part through the efforts of Holy Cross Father Richard Timm, as the first apex body of NGOs and CSOs in Bangladesh. It remains the largest in terms of membership. ADAB has a strong commitment to secular values and very limited involvement from Islamic FIOs, with the exception of the Aga Khan Network. Christian FIOs, however, are active in the organization, including Caritas, CCDB, and ADRA Bangladesh, as are smaller organizations including HEED and Koinonia. In 2001 the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) split from ADAB and has since become the network of larger and more elite national NGOs, led by BRAC, Proshika, and ASA. There have been suggestions that the government pushed for the split to mitigate the growing influence of NGOs in the country.

In addition to these national networking structures, several faith-based networks exist in Bangladesh, including Christian networks, which are well organized and funded. The ACT Alliance for example, closely associated with the World Council of Churches, is a coalition of over 140 churches and affiliated organizations that mobilizes roughly US$1.5 billion a year from its members to fund projects in a number of countries including Bangladesh. The Micah Network mobilizes funding and hosts capacity building workshops and consultations, with a more evangelical orientation. They work with several local FIOs including Bangladesh Nazarene Mission, Baptist Aid, and Faith in Action. World Vision has its own FBO Advocacy group established in 2011 with roughly 25 members, of which 20 are Christian and five non-Christian. They advocate on issues of common concern among the organizations, primarily children's rights, child health, and economic justice for women.

Muslim FIOs have their own apex body known as the Association of Muslim Welfare Agencies in Bangladesh (AMWAB). Founded in 1993, AMWAB currently claims over 320 local NGO and CSO members. Much like their secular and Christian counterparts AMWAB's objectives are to foster collaboration and coordination, host trainings and information dissemination, and mobilize funding primarily through *zakat* and *sadaqah* donations. AMWAB also runs a research and publication program. Although it is the most extensive network of Muslim FIOs in Bangladesh, AMWAB suffers from severe capacity constraints, possibly exacerbated by the recent government crackdown on Islamists. AMWAB is not well integrated into the broader development community in Bangladesh; however, it has potential to serve as an important locus for engagement of grassroots Muslim development actors.

Most Buddhist and Hindu development actors do not actively engage in formal networking structures, but do maintain a variety of international connections, some directly with donors while others are religious in nature.

4.5 Engagement of Religious Leaders in Development

In addition to the development and charitable work of faith-inspired organizations, the engagement of religious leaders in support of development programs is another important way in which religious actors are involved in the response to development challenges. Engaging religious leaders can be advantageous for several reasons. They are often highly respected and influential figures in their communities, they can reach large audiences and effectively influence behavior change in their constituencies, and they can bolster support for and acceptance of development initiatives more generally. Religious networks likewise can be an invaluable resource in areas where little other formal infrastructure may exist. These networks can be mobilized in everything from emergency response efforts to the dissemination of critical information on a range of topics.

Among Bangladesh's religious communities, Christian leaders are the most engaged in development work, and much of this work takes place through Christian networks and umbrella groups. However, Christian religious leaders do engage with the broader development community on various networking platforms on issues ranging from education to climate change. Buddhist and Hindu leaders, though often very socially-engaged within their own communities, are less active at the national level. As minority religious traditions they are not as often targeted by programs that have religious engagement as a focal strategy and therefore there remains a significant gap in engaging such leaders, not least as a means to address some of the unique development challenges facing their communities.

The participation of Muslim leaders in national development efforts is extremely varied, ranging from vocal support, to ambivalence and even organized opposition.

While on the whole they are under-engaged by the broader development community, Muslim leaders are typically the targets of programs that aim to expose faith leaders to development programs to mitigate the historical opposition some have had to these programs. A stark ideological divide in Bangladesh between certain subsets of Bangladesh's Islamic community and development actors has been recognized for some time. While this divide involves two broad and divergent visions for the country (a secular democratic society vs an Islamic state), it also hinges on specific issues such as the economic and social empowerment of women and the marginalization of Islamic education. This divide has turned violent on several occasions, the most noteworthy in the early 1990s when several NGOs came under attack. The development community has not faced this level of organized opposition since that period, but the ideological gulf remains, much of it is based on mistrust and misinformation.

As political tensions rise in Bangladesh, and given the more visible presence of new conservative groups such as Hefazat-e-Islami and others, there is a perceived need to create opportunities for engagement between the religious and development communities to attempt to narrow this gap and avoid violence that could derail Bangladesh's development progress. The most extensive and well-known such effort is a collaborative project between the Asia Foundation and the Government of Bangladesh's Islamic Foundation known as the Leaders of Influence Project. It sought to engage religious leaders in dialogue around development priorities and offered them practical exposure to development strategies and approaches. Other organizations engage local religious leaders and ulama in particular in their projects, but often not in a systematic fashion, with each organization operating using its own network of religious leaders.

4.5.1 The Islamic Foundation

The Islamic Foundation was created in 1975 by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in order to revive the mission of the Pakistan-era Islamic Academy, which was tasked with propagating Islamic ideals in Bangladeshi society, carrying out projects related to religious education, social service, and the promotion of Islamic scholarship. The Islamic Foundation is an autonomous organization that operates under the Bangladesh Ministry of Religious Affairs. It receives government funding as well as grants from foreign governments and NGOs.

The Islamic Foundation's stated objective is "to preach and propagate the values and ideals of Islam, the only complete code of life acceptable to the Almighty Allah, in its right perspective as a religion of humanity, tolerance, and universal brotherhood and bring the majority people of Bangladesh under the banner of Islam."[246] It is generally viewed as a moderating force within Bangladeshi Islam, carrying out trainings for imams that emphasize religious tolerance and that seek to expose them to development projects and approaches. Because the Islamic Foundation is

government-controlled, the leadership can be politicized in favor of the ruling Awami League, presenting a barrier to the engagement of more conservative Islamic communities.

Their current work includes:

- helping to establish and maintain mosques, Islamic centers, and Islamic academic institutions;
- supporting scholarly research on Islam and Islamic contributions to science, culture, and politics;
- providing awards and scholarships for research in the field of Islamic studies;
- publishing literature on Islamic history, culture, and law; and
- organizing lectures, debates, and symposia on the issues of Islamic law, philosophy, history, and culture.[247]

The Islamic Foundation absorbed two previous organizations, the Darul ulum and Baitul Mukarram Society. The Darul ulum, now known as Islamic Academy, was founded in 1960 and promotes Islamic scholarship. The Baitul Mukarram Society operates the Baitul Mukarram mosque in Dhaka, built in 1959. Today Baitul Mukarram is the national mosque and is the tenth largest in the world. The Mosque Complex also houses the largest Islamic library in Bangladesh.

Islamic Foundation's headquarters are in Dhaka, with 58 district offices across the country, as well as seven Imam Training Academy Centers and 31 Islamic Mission Centers. These facilities are used for imam training programs as well as social service provision, including medical missions and mosque-based literacy centers that provide literacy training to children and adults.

The Islamic Foundation maintains an extensive national network of imams who they engage in various programs and trainings. The Imam Training Academy runs a 45-day course that trains about 5,000 Muslim leaders every year.[248] Imams study religious texts, making connections to contemporary social issues such as violence against women, corruption, early childhood education, poverty, and HIV/AIDS awareness and are encouraged to incorporate these messages into Friday sermons and conversations with community members. As part of their anti-dowry campaign, imams who have attended Islamic Academy trainings are urged to refuse to perform a marriage if dowry has been paid and to condemn child marriage. They also talk to the couple about women's rights after performing a marriage ceremony. Imams are also given the skills to establish mosque-run development activities, such as farming and livestock management.

The Islamic Academy and their partners maintain that imams are uniquely suited to educate their communities on development topics. Mosques often act as community centers and as such are an important access points within poor and remote

communities where NGOs and government services may struggle to establish a presence. Within these communities imams are social leaders with influence and trust who can speak with moral authority about issues that can be contentious and divisive, such as gender equality and corruption.

Imam Training Academy aims to play a role in countering radical and extremist ideology. Dr. Sayed Abdullah Al-Maruf of the Islamic Foundation explains that the training that is provided is aimed in part at equipping the imams to be a moderating influence among their peers and within their communities.[249] However, certain preconditions for participation in Islamic Academy trainings can limit their impact within the conservative religious demographics where they would be most necessary. The Islamic Foundation often does not select imams that they feel would be disruptive during training and many imams refuse to participate. The program requires a tenth grade education. Political allegiances come in to play as well: many within the Islamic Foundation have strong Awami League connections and many of the imams selects for programs are likewise affiliated with the party. Thus less-educated, politically conservative, and more radical subgroups would be critically important targets of this type of engagement, but have thus far largely been left out of the programs run through the Imam Training Academy.

4.5.2 The Asia Foundation's Engagement of Religious Leaders

The Asia Foundation, with funding from USAID, launched the Leaders of Influence (LoI) program in 2004. It was part of a larger regional LoI effort begun in Indonesia that aimed to contribute to "improved local perceptions of foreign development interventions" and utilize imams as "agents of change" in their communities.[250] Combining classroom and site visit components, it exposed imams to a variety of USAID-supported development programs in sectors such as agriculture, education, and healthcare. The Program worked in collaboration with the Islamic Foundation's Imam Training Academy where the program drew many of the religious leaders for the program. Asia Foundation estimates that the program reached at least 20,000 local leaders. The program used an "Islamic framework," a curriculum that accessibly related social and development challenges to key passages in the Qur'an, that was developed by a regional resource group of Islamic scholars and activists and later adapted to each country context.

The LoI promoted dialogue around critical development challenges and community needs by bringing the leaders on site visits to USAID-supported development projects operated by local partners, and providing training on development topics.[251] From 2007 to 2011 the program was expanded under LoI2 to include Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian as well as some secular leaders. The second iteration of the program, LoI2, also expanded the program into a broader regional dialogue, facilitating study visit exchange with leaders from a number of Asian nations. Bangladeshi leaders visited countries like India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and

participants learned about organizations in these countries that foster grassroots organizing and provide social services, and discussed ways that they can bring aspects of these programs to their own communities.   A regional conference in Dhaka in March 2010 brought together 80 participants from 14 countries. A major stated goal of LoI and LoI2 was to foster "grassroots activism to promote democratic values and ensure access to basic social services."[252]

The LoI aimed to bridge the divide between religious and development communities, intentionally creating space for NGOs and religious leaders to participate in dialogue. The Asia Foundation suggests that the LoI program has been influential in alleviating local leaders' suspicions about foreign-funded NGO projects, helping to bridge the divide between local communities and NGOs, and to build interfaith understanding. Nazrul Islam Senior Program Advisor, with the Asia Foundation, argues that local religious leaders were often very apprehensive about western-funded development projects prior to the LoI program.[253] Although many imams were initially hesitant to participate in the program, through trainings and site visits many stated afterwards that they had a better understanding of the importance of development projects in their communities.

The project has made considerable strides in building trust and understanding between the religious and development communities. Before-and-after participant surveys administered by The Asia Foundation found a "significant positive attitudinal change" amongst participants, and that participation "allayed community suspicions, as evidenced by increased acceptance about such interventions," with local development projects reporting increased participation and demand. After receiving trainings more than 80 percent of imams surveyed reported that they were actively working to raise awareness about the need for women's empowerment in their communities.

Though the LoI project ended in 2011, in the years since the Asia Foundation has utilized its network of imams on a number of smaller initiatives, most notably on critical social issues including corruption and gender. For advocacy programs around domestic violence, the Asia Foundation engaged not only imams but also their wives by holding 'courtyard meetings' with local women to discuss and resolve situations of domestic abuse. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this strategy was successful, though women have a comparatively small geographical reach compared to their husbands. There is a great need to engage more women in similar efforts to make a serious contribution in religiously rooted advocacy around gender issues.

5. Conclusions and Looking Ahead

Religious actors and, more specifically, religiously inspired political parties play important roles in rising social and political tensions in Bangladesh. Any development practitioner working in this context needs to take them into account. Beyond this political context, however, Bangladesh's faith communities have longstanding commitments to social service and humanitarian efforts and many groups are actively engaged in development efforts, though the details are often poorly documented and misunderstood.

Bangladesh's religious landscape is important, but not broadly understood. More faith literacy has the potential to contribute to better collaboration and innovative partnerships that can increase the effectiveness of development interventions that target some of Bangladesh's persistent development challenges. This is especially true for those that involve underlying social norms and attitudes. Here religious engagement has particular importance.

Engagement can be a complex and challenging endeavor, given rising tensions around and politicization of religion in Bangladesh. Efforts should be well-informed and involve careful planning. By providing an overview of religious actors and drawing attention to traditions of social service the report points to avenues for better engagement. It thus offers a first step in identifying key issues and actors.

The following emerged as key points in the review:

The Context

Religion plays a central role in the daily lives of many ordinary citizens and in the broader social dynamics including rising tensions. Bangladesh is a country with high religiosity where religious leaders, institutions, and teachings have wide influence. The recent killings of prominent secular and atheist bloggers have brought international attention to divisions along religious lines in Bangladeshi society. But it is important to understand the deep roots of this contentious divide in the country's turbulent history, from colonial occupation through Partition to the Liberation War and now in the vitriolic political stalemate. The secular-religious divide has been a central theme in the International Crimes Tribunal, which has placed Islamist leaders, most associated with Bangladesh's largest Islamic political party Jamaat-e-Islami, on trial for war crimes committed in support of Pakistan during the Liberation War. The loosely-bound 'Shahbag movement,' which demanded harsh sentences for Islamist leaders, has come to be emblematic of Bangladeshi secular identity, while a number of new conservative Islamic groups have emerged in response. These tensions have important repercussions for many development issues, prominent among them education and gender policies.

Some religious actors have opposed development efforts in Bangladesh particularly where they intentionally or unintentionally alter social and cultural norms. Since the 1990s, when many NGOs faced organized opposition and occasional attacks from Islamist groups, there has been a narrative of inherent antagonism between religious communities and development efforts. Points of contention have centered on changing social norms, particularly related to increasing rights and agency for women. A Pew survey found that 55 percent of Bangladeshis considered there to be a conflict between religion and modern society, the second highest rate in the Muslim world.[254] Groups like Hefazat-e-Islami, tied to orthodox Quomi madrassas, have called for the revocation of the 2011 Women's Development Policy. This has only served to reinforce these perceptions.

Faith-inspired organizations make important contributions to development in Bangladesh. Purposeful collaboration with these faith actors can highlight the positive roles religion can play in development (and thus counterbalance some more negative trends). Faith actors are engaged in virtually every development sector, but their impact is probably most noteworthy in education where they are significant providers, not just in terms of scale, but also quality. Though there are concerns over Quomi madrasa curriculums, many faith-based schools rank among Bangladesh's top performing institutions. Exploring and highlighting the real development contributions of faith-inspired actors can provide a basis for an alternative non-politicized dialogue on religion and society in Bangladesh that might contribute to easing tensions.

Despite Bangladesh's large Muslim majority, minority faith traditions and sub-currents within Islam are important for development, and there is scope for better engagement and collaboration that engages different traditions, both within and beyond Islam. Local Christian FIOs, including Caritas and CCDB, are well established and among of the largest, most innovative development organizations operating in Bangladesh. Sufi traditions are influential in Bangladesh, particularly among women, traditionally barred from formal religious practice at mosques. Sufi groups are increasingly entering the development arena. Hindu and Buddhist organizations play important support roles in their communities, which have long seen significant marginalization and persecution. Apart from Christian FIOs, many minority faith groups are not actively linked into broader development efforts at the national level.

Ways Ahead

Faith actors, especially smaller local FIOs, would benefit from better networking and dialogue with the broader development community at the national level. Likewise development actors would benefit from the unique insights of grassroots faith actors regarding community needs and local attitudes. While several national development platforms exist in Bangladesh, these only include the

largest FIOs. Faith-specific networks engage some of the smaller organizations, but these often operate in isolation. Better networking and dialogue could improve coordination, foster use of best practice at the grassroots level, and increase capacity and dialogue around development goals and priorities.

Targeted support for informal women leaders within religions has the potential to foster gender change locally and using a religious lens. Women rarely hold leadership roles in religious institutions and FIOs at present; this is true across faith traditions in Bangladesh. Given the tension between development actors and religious actors on women's empowerment, action here should be cautious, but could be of great importance. These women leader can open dialogues about the ways religious traditions shape women's roles and expectations in the home and in society. They will need support, resources, and access to transnational networks, but this will allow Bangladeshi women to shape their own empowerment vis-à-vis religion.

Development practitioners can learn from FIO community-based models and links with local faith networks. Many FIOs have been active in Bangladeshi communities for decades and are among the most established and trusted organizations operating in the country with strong grassroots connections. If members of the development community are looking to better engage grassroots community groups or faith leaders, FIOs can play important roles in facilitating this engagement.

'Values-based' approaches may be effectively employed in areas where strong moral dimensions would have impact. Though they vary greatly, many FIOs share an emphasis on core values drawn from religious teachings, which are also often highly influential values within the communities they serve. These values serve as inspiration, but also shape their activities in unique ways, perhaps most notably in microfinance, where many FIOs object to the concept of charging interest on loans to the poor. This is particularly true for Islamic FIOs for whom interest is forbidden. Beyond this, however, more research is needed to determine how values-based approaches that engage religious leaders could effectively advance ideas and action on the challenges of corruption and women's empowerment.

Local grassroots faith-inspired organizations are numerous and have a considerable local influence, but more research is needed to understand their roles. Some estimates put the number of religiously affiliated groups at over 200,000,[255] but there has been no real mapping of these local grassroots groups and very little is known about their approaches and activities. Likewise little is known about how they link with other FIOs nationally, fit into broader ideological movements, and interact with secular development actors. WFDD and BRAC University are currently undertaking a pilot study that would give an initial picture of these groups, their social influence, and development impact.

Annex 1 List of FIOs:

FIO	Faith Affiliation	Year Founded	Country of Origin
Agrasar Buddha Anathalaya	Buddhist		Bangladesh
Agrasara Memorial Society of Bangladesh	Buddhist		Bangladesh
Bangladesh Buddhist Missionary Society	Buddhist	1977	Bangladesh
Bangladesh Marma Buddisht Association (BMBA)	Buddhist		Bangladesh
Banoful	Buddhist	2004	Bangladesh
Baraigaon Orphanage	Buddhist	1942	Bangladesh
Dharmarajika Orphanage, Buddhist Monastery	Buddhist	1951	Bangladesh
Moanoghar	Buddhist	1974	Bangladesh
Parbatya Bouddha Mission	Buddhist	1983	Bangladesh
Seba Sangha	Buddhist		Bangladesh
Warapunya Bouddha Anathalaya	Buddhist		Bangladesh
Adventist Development & Relief Agency International (ADRA)	Christian	1971	USA
Agape	Christian		Bangladesh
Agape Bangladesh	Christian		Bangladesh
Agape Social Concern	Christian	1971	Bangladesh
Annesha Foundation	Christian	1989	Bangladesh
Assemblies of God Mission	Christian		USA
Association of Baptists	Christian	1957	USA
The Australian Baptist Missionary Society	Christian	1864	Australia

Bangladesh Bible Society	Christian	1953	Bangladesh
Bangladesh Blind Mission	Christian	1972	Bangladesh
Bangladesh Evergreen Hosanna Council International	Christian		Bangladesh
Bangladesh Lutheran Mission, Danish (BLM-D)	Christian		Denmark
Bangladesh Lutheran Mission, Finnish	Christian		Finland
Bangladesh Lutheran Mission, Norwegian (BLM-N)	Christian		Norway
Bangladesh Mission Foreign Mission Board Southern Baptist Convention	Christian		USA
Bangladesh Nazarene Mission	Christian		Bangladesh
Bangladesh Theological Seminary	Christian		Bangladesh
Baptist Aid Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (Baptist Aid-BBCF)	Christian	1920	Bangladesh
Baptist Mid Mission Bangladesh	Christian	1979	USA
Baptist Missionary Society (British)	Christian		UK
Calvary Apostolic Church	Christian		USA
CARITAS – Bangladesh	Christian	1967	Bangladesh
Caritas Switzerland	Christian		Switzerland
Christian Service International	Christian		USA
Christian Aid	Christian	1972	UK
Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB)	Christian	1973	Bangladesh
Christian Life Bangladesh	Christian		Bangladesh

Christian Ministry to Children and Youth (CMCY)	Christian	1995	Bangladesh
Christian Mission Hospital	Christian	1926	Bangladesh
Christian Service Society	Christian	1972	Bangladesh
Church of Bangladesh Social Development Programme	Christian	1971	Bangladesh
Churches of God Mission	Christian		USA
College of Christian Theology Bangladesh	Christian	1968	Bangladesh
Compassion International Bangladesh	Christian	2003	USA
Danchurch Aid	Christian	1980	Denmark
Danish Bangladesh Leprosy Mission	Christian		Denmark
DIAKONIA / Swedish Free Church Aid	Christian	1970	Sweden
Faith in Action	Christian		Bangladesh
Heed Bangladesh	Christian	1974	Bangladesh
ICCO (Stiching Interkerkelijke Organisatie voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking)	Christian	1972	Netherlands
Habitat for Humanity	Christian	1999	USA
Hope Worldwide	Christian	1996	USA
interlife	Christian		Sweden
Lutheran Healthcare	Christian	1995	USA
Missionaries of Charity	Christian		India
Tranzsend	Christian	1885	New Zealand
World Life	Christian		South Korea
Jatiya Church Parishad	Christian	1949	Bangladesh
Jatiya Manob Kalyan Mission	Christian		Bangladesh
Koinonia	Christian	1983	Bangladesh
Leprosy Mission	Christian		UK

Love Thy Neighbour	Christian	1995	Bangladesh
Love And Peace	Christian		Bangladesh
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)	Christian	1970	USA
National Council of Young Man's Christian Association of Bangladesh	Christian	1974	Bangladesh
New Apostolic Church Bangladesh	Christian		Canada
Presbyterian Fellowship in Bangladesh	Christian		South Korea
The Salvation Army	Christian	1980	UK
Salvation for the Deserving	Christian	2003	Bangladesh
Santal Mission Norwegian Board	Christian		Norway
Seventh Day Adventist Church of Bangladesh	Christian		USA
Society for International Ministries	Christian	1816	Canada
Unitarian Service Committee of Canada in Bangladesh	Christian	1971	Canada
Unitarian Service for Development & Peace	Christian		Bangladesh
World Concern	Christian		USA
World Mission Prayer League (Lamb Hospital)	Christian	1891	USA
World Missionary Evangelism	Christian		USA
World Renew	Christian	1972	USA
World Vision Bangladesh	Christian	1970	USA
Young Women's Christian Association of Bangladesh	Christian	1971	Bangladesh

Jagorani Jubo Sangha (JJN)	Hindu		Bangladesh
Jana Kalyan Sangha (JKS)	Hindu		Bangladesh
Jatiya Tarun Sangha (JTS)	Hindu	1966	Bangladesh
Maitri Samaj Kalyan Sangha	Hindu		Bangladesh
Mitali Sangha	Hindu		Bangladesh
Palli Seba Sangha (PSS)	Hindu		Bangladesh
Palli Sree	Hindu		Bangladesh
Palli Unnayan Sangha	Hindu		Bangladesh
Probartak Sangha	Hindu	1920	Bangladesh
Ramakrishna Mission	Hindu	1899	India
Bangladesh Inter Religious Council for Peace And Justice (BICPAJ)	Inter-faith	1983	Bangladesh
Al Basher International Foundation	Muslim		Saudi Arabia
Al Haramain Islamic Foundation	Muslim		Saudi Arabia
Al Ihsan Social Development Center	Muslim		Bangladesh
Al Jameatul Islamiah	Muslim	1938	Bangladesh
Al Jameatul Islamiah Al Arabia Mozaher Ulum	Muslim	1943	Bangladesh

Al Markazul Islami	Muslim	1981	Bangladesh
Al -Watan Charitable Society	Muslim		Bangladesh
Al-Forqan Foundation	Muslim		Saudi Arabia
Allama Abul Khair Foundation	Muslim	2004	Bangladesh
Allama Fazlullah Foundation	Muslim	2000	Bangladesh
Al-Manar Islami Sangstha	Muslim		Bangladesh
AMAN (Association for Muslim Advancement Network)	Muslim		Bangladesh
AMWAB (Association of Muslim Welfare Agencies in Bangladesh)	Muslim		Bangladesh
Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT)	Muslim	1989	Bangladesh
Bangladesh Masjid Mission	Muslim		Bangladesh
Boalia Islamia Madrasha & Etimkhana	Muslim		Bangladesh
Darul Ihsan Trust	Muslim	1986	Bangladesh
Darul Kidmah Wal Falah Bangladesh	Muslim	1998	Bangladesh
Darul Quran Foundation	Muslim	1979	Bangladesh
Dhaka Ahsania Mission	Muslim	1958	Bangladesh
Haqqaani Mission Bangladesh	Muslim	1990	Bangladesh
Hidaya Foundation	Muslim	1999	USA
Human Appeal	Muslim	1991	UK
Human Concern	Muslim	1980	Canada
International Islamic Relief Organisation	Muslim	1991	Saudi Arabia
Islahul Muslimeen Parishad	Muslim		Bangladesh
Islami Bank Foundation	Muslim		Bangladesh
Islami Help Samaj Unnayan Sangstha	Muslim		Bangladesh

Islami Samaj Kalyan Samity	Muslim		Bangladesh
Islamic Aid	Muslim		UK
Islamic Aid Bangladesh	Muslim	1990	Bangladesh
Islamic Blind Mission	Muslim	1978	Bangladesh
Islamic Medical Mission	Muslim		Bangladesh
Islamic Paribar Kalyan Sangstha	Muslim		Bangladesh
Islamic Relief – U.K.	Muslim	1991	Bangladesh
Islamic Relief Agency	Muslim		Sudan
Islamic Relief Committee	Muslim		Bangladesh
Islamic Relief Committee-Bangladesh	Muslim		Bangladesh
Islamic Unnayan Sangstha	Muslim		Bangladesh
Ispahani Islamia Eye Institute and Hospital Society	Muslim	1960	Bangladesh
Khalifa Foundation	Muslim		Bangladesh
Khuddamul Quran Bangladesh	Muslim		Bangladesh
Kuwait Joint Relief Committee	Muslim	1992	Kuwait
Madrasha Al-Sharaf Al-Islamia	Muslim		Bangladesh
Madrasha Arabia Khairia & Etimkhana	Muslim		Bangladesh
Markazul Muslimen	Muslim		Bangladesh
Masjid Council for Community Advancement (MACCA)	Muslim	1999	Bangladesh
Masjid Samaj Bangladesh	Muslim		Bangladesh
Misbah Foundation	Muslim		Bangladesh
Muslim Aid-UK, Bangladesh Field Office	Muslim	1991	UK
Muslim Hands International	Muslim	1993	Bangladesh
Muslim Welfare Organization	Muslim		Bangladesh

Qatar Charity	Muslim	1994	Qatar
Rabeta Al Alam Al Islam (Muslim World League)	Muslim		Saudi Arabia
Sardar Sultan Mahmood Welfare Foundation	Muslim		Bangladesh
Shah Waliullah Islamic Centre	Muslim		Bangladesh
Sharjah Charity International	Muslim		UAE
Takaful Charity Society	Muslim		Bangladesh
The Zakat Foundation of America Bangladesh	Muslim		USA
World Assembly of Muslim Youths	Muslim	1972	Saudi Arabia

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