The place of religious inequalities within international development and humanitarian response frameworks: Lessons from Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Within the international development and humanitarian arenas no one disagrees with the language and aspirations of inclusion, protection, rights and equality. Yet, most development framings – policy and operational – have still to develop meaningful ways to attend to the specific advantages or disadvantages associated with religious views or beliefs that shape the way people and communities function and behave within society. This paper explores influential conceptual and programmatic framings of international development and humanitarian response, specifically the human development approach, capital and asset-based framings, horizontal inequalities, the SDGs and humanitarian principles. We analyse the extent to which they engage with considerations of religious inequalities (religious diversity, identity, inclusion) and language of 'religion' and belief. Drawing on an evidenced-based case study of humanitarian/development responses in Iraq in the period from 2014 to 2019, the paper illustrates the reality of how a smorgasbord of religion-blind development concepts and framings interplay at the frontline of a humanitarian response to conflict, and the ways in which multiple actors wrestle and flex to design, target and implement programmes that were conceived in a religion-blind frame. The research shows how the explicit incorporation of the context and nature of religious diversity dynamics into frameworks has critical real-world impacts on the design, delivery, monitoring and impacts of interventions. Failing to incorporate an understanding of inequalities experienced by people marginalized because of their religious affiliation or belief (whether intentional or through mere oversight) has very likely muted the hoped-for outcomes of many development and emergency response initiatives. Our hope is that international development and humanitarian framings can better deliver on their objective to "leave no one behind" by ensuring inequalities on account of religious identity or practice are appropriately considered.

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, the dominant framings for development and humanitarian response have moved away from a preoccupation with economic modernisation and improvements in income towards a much richer understanding of the human condition. A noticeable shift has been the move from neo-liberal approaches that characterised the interventions of the Washington consensus, to "development with a human face" and rights-based agendas, that have been fronted by a variety of UN organisations (Gore, 2000; Jolly, 1991; Sen, 2005). Arguably, we have arrived at a global consensus on what constitutes good development – as epitomised in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) agenda – and a global agreement on a set of humanitarian principles (Sphere, 2018).

Within the international development and humanitarian arenas, practically no one disagrees with the language and aspirations of inclusion, well-being, protection, rights, participation and equality. Yet, most development framings – policy and operational - have still to develop meaningful ways to attend to the specific advantages or disadvantages associated with religious views or beliefs that shape the way people and communities function and behave within society, including as the basis for unequal government restrictions or as a driver of social hostilities (Allouche, Hoffler, and Lind 2020; Majumdar, 2019; Tadros, 2022; Wilkinson and Eggert, 2021).

Failing to incorporate an understanding of inequalities experienced by people marginalised because of their religious affiliation, beliefs, or practices (whether intentional or through mere oversight) can (i) lead to a misdiagnosis or failure to address the sources and nature of conflicts

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and vulnerability risks to particular individuals or communities; (ii) mute the hoped-for outcomes of development and emergency response initiatives and, (iii) even lead to increased tensions or further marginalisation of the most vulnerable. Positively, there are examples of how, with further insight into religious dynamics, challenges can be overcome and programmes delivered that increase access to education for women and girls or other development objectives.

The purpose of this paper is to review key well-known development and humanitarian response frameworks and approaches, highlighting the extent to which they engage with considerations of religious inequalities (religious diversity, identity, inclusion) and language of "religion and belief". While any all-encompassing development framework or humanitarian response should, for reasons stated above, accommodate these considerations – and be non-exclusionary across all identity markers – they rarely do so in any explicit sense. The operationalisation of these frameworks and approaches, therefore, stumble on the realpolitik of what is happening on the ground and the nuances of poverty, culture, conflict, vulnerabilities and exclusion that can only be understood in relation to contextual understanding of religious diversity and inequality. For instance, the Leaving No One Behind agenda is, by its very definition, fully inclusive. But, this agenda, as with others, must not merely accommodate all groups "in theory" but must be constructed to intentionally expose areas of blindness to a particular area of exclusion "in practice". The lack of attention to religious inequalities in development approaches has real (usually negative) implications for individuals and communities and can adversely impact the ability of projects to achieve their objectives.

Moreover, this oversight may have unintentionally led to regressive outcomes for those individuals and groups that development and humanitarian actors seek to serve. For instance, work on Nigeria by Aderounmu (2022) shows how a failure to consider religious hostilities led to the quota in higher education policy being misinterpreted as the intended clients believed the policy was biased against them. Similarly, a study from Uganda by Muhumuza et al. (2022) highlights how failing to consider what indigenous people hold sacred backfired in terms of protecting the environment. Another vivid example of the consequences of this "blindness" to religious dynamics comes from a case study in Sudan by Ahmed (2022). He illustrates how a lack of attention to the hostile perceptions from people in the South to the identity of the Islamic Bank meant that the Bank's development interventions were considered highly suspicious and lacking legitimacy.

In the first part of this paper, we explore some of the conceptual and programmatic framings of international development and humanitarian response. We analyse the extent to which those discriminated against on the basis of religious identity, whether individually or collectively, have been recognised, engaged with, and integrated into development conceptual frameworks and programmes. In the second part of the paper, we take the reader into an evidenced-based case study of humanitarian/ development responses in Iraq from 2014 to 2019. Based on primary fieldwork, we portray the reality of how an array of religion-blind development concepts and framings interplay at the frontline of a humanitarian response to conflict and how multiple actors wrestle and flex to design, target and implement programmes. These efforts, at times, sought to engage the complex religious diversity dynamics, while on other occasions they were seemingly conceived in a religion-blind frame.

The case study looks particularly at UK-supported assistance efforts in response to the humanitarian need in Iraq. Between 2014 and 2019 this amounted to at least 246.5 million GBP, distributed through multiple programs and prioritising significant assistance via multilateral systems. DFID was the lead donor in establishing the Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund (UK DFID 2016, p. 8). Field research was conducted between November 2021 and February 2022. It included key informant interviews with a range of actors from bilateral, multilateral agencies, international and national NGOs and community representatives. These interviews were supplemented with informal field visits in Ninewa,

Erbil, and Duhok governorates with additional stakeholders from local organisations and affected communities who provided contextual observations on relevant issues. The eighteen key informant interviews included country directors from international NGOs and local community-based organisations, protection advisors for the UK Foreign Office or UN agencies, and frontline Iraqi program managers and monitoring and evaluation specialists. Ten of the eighteen interviewees were of Iraqi nationality, including participants from majority and minority religious and ethnic communities, all of whom had been directly engaged in various aspects of the international assistance response between 2014 and 2019 (Barker, 2022). The combination of sources provided essential insights into multiple aspects of a humanitarian and development agenda where religious diversity and discrimination were relevant factors.

Also analysed as part of this research were program and policy documents that describe the UK Humanitarian Assistance Programming for Iraq from 2014 to 2019. In addition to the specific UK project documents, the research evaluated the Iraq Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) and the Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund (IHPF) annual reports. These were assessed alongside numerous other UN agency and NGO assessments, situation reports, and other documents. The research sought to understand if and how religious inequalities were addressed within the policy and programmatic responses adopted by actors in response to a conflict-driven humanitarian crisis and what outcomes were sought and achieved from those efforts.

In the final part of this paper, we look at how explicitly incorporating considerations of religion and religious inequalities into development and humanitarian framings can make policies and interventions more inclusive and responsive to glaring inequalities on the ground. As shown in the case study, the explicit incorporation of the context and nature of religious inequalities into frameworks has critical real-world impacts on the design, delivery, monitoring and impacts of interventions. Our hope is that international development and humanitarian framings can better deliver on their objective to "leave no one behind" by ensuring inequalities on account of religious identity or practice are appropriately considered.

2. Are development and humanitarian frameworks sensitive to religion and religious inequalities?

Development and humanitarian framings[1] frequently identify a range of minority groups as vulnerable and excluded on the basis of their ethnicity, gender, migration status or political leanings, leading to targeted programmatic interventions, such as gender-based empowerment, sensitisation and literacy training for migrants, people living with disabilities, or ethnic minorities. Yet, the religious and belief systems of these social categories have largely been overlooked, even though they so obviously intersect with other social categories.

In fact, many identifying labels for the poor, marginalised and vulnerable are interwoven with, and often a proxy for, an individual's or group's religious identity or beliefs. An example is the Rohingya, often referred to as the "Rohingya Muslims", which is a self-labelling they feel comfortable using, but which is at odds with the Burmese state's term for them as "Bengali". As noted in the World Bank's Pathways to Peace report, this contested identity led to the exclusion of Rohingya from the formal justice system and has set the conditions that have led to targeted violence and mass displacement (World Bank, 2018). The lack of explicit inclusion of religion and belief in development frameworks and programming, as well as a recognition of their intersectionality with other categories of disadvantage, can seriously undermine the hoped-for

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[1] 'Framings' here refers to the dominant normative approaches that are taken by key global actors that inform the architecture, policies and interventions that are put in place to protect and build more productive and resilient lives, livelihoods, societies and economies.

impacts of development and humanitarian interventions. Take Lebanon as another example: it exemplifies the structural aspects of religion, where confessional/sectarian identity shapes individuals' exposure to inequality. Yet, this can get overstressed as faith is a deeply intersectional identity. Lebanese Shi'a have tended to be historically more marginalised but are also more rural and working-class. They are not marginalised only *because* they're Shia, but class and geography are also relevant factors. Christians have tended to be wealthier, not because they are Christian, but because they were a favoured group historically under the French mandate, which provided some ongoing economic or political benefits.

How then should we understand the nature and relevance of religion for development policy and practice? Defining the nature and elements of religion is a notoriously challenging project, generating an enormous amount of literature. Frazer and Friedli (2015) attempt to provide a framework for practitioners and policymakers working in conflict-affected contexts. Drawing from a diverse set of academic approaches, they provide five ways of thinking about the range of ways in which religion can be said to be "playing a role" in a conflict: 1) religion as community, this includes the collective, identity-forming nature of religion, which can strengthen cohesion within a community, including hardening boundaries between groups; 2) religion as a set of teachings, which encompasses how religion shapes views of the world, how it is and ought to be, including definitions of right and wrong, providing justification or grounds for various forms of action; 3) religion as spirituality, which emphasises the often individual and internal relationship with the divine or immaterial or ultimate, which can be vital for meaning making and motivations; 4) religion as practice recognises the extensive ways in which daily life, including food, dress, celebrations, or rituals, derive meaning from and are often the public expressions of religion for individuals and communities. The final category is 5) religion as discourse, which acknowledges the ways of thinking, acting, and communicating, which may draw on religious vocabulary, concepts, or symbols to inform a particular logic or worldview and related actions.

These categories are not mutually exclusive but are often complementary. In contexts with high religious diversity, each factor might have greater or less salience for individuals or communities and the relationships within and between communities and their connections to the state or other actors in a given context. Religion, at times, may overlap with other identity markers (e.g., ethnicity, language, geographic origin, political affiliation) and, at other times, is distinct from those identity groupings. As work from Stewart (2009a, 2009b) notes, which identity is more salient is often based on which is the stronger basis for "political favouritism or discrimination or socio-economic inequalities" in a given context. In the case of Iraq, as shown in the case study below, ethnicity does not map neatly onto religion. For example, there are significant cleavages between Arab Iraqis, of which Sunni and Shi'a religious affiliation, including its attendant political and communal factors, provides a critical lens. Other communities have an ethno-religious dimension, for which religion is a decisive marker. For example, the Yazidi community is primarily Kurdish-speaking, yet many would point to religious identity as a distinctive marker (Allison, 2017). Additionally, the Shabak, an ethnic minority, which religiously are majority Shi'a, with a Sunni minority, have sometimes found solidarity and support from Shi'a communities because of religious affiliation. At the same time, in other cases, they have faced discrimination because of heterodox beliefs or cultural or linguistic differences as a community (Al-Qaddo, 2022). These particular identities have been the basis for various forms of direct targeting and violence as well as more indirect marginalisation or oppression, ranging from targeting of religious and cultural heritage sites (Fobbe, 2019; Isakhan and Shahab, 2022), to political and security decisions which have hindered the ability to return from displacement (Salloum, 2020). In cases such as this, the work of Petri (2019) is helpful in not only seeking to understand the roles religion might be playing in a given conflict but, importantly, the specific forms of vulnerabilities that

religious minorities might face. Adopting elements of a human security approach, Petri develops a continuum that ranges from what he labels more passive aspects of religion, primarily forms of religious identification, toward semi-active, including religious participation and elements of lifestyle, to active, moving out toward civic engagement or public expression of beliefs or behaviours in various realms of communal or political life. The types of vulnerabilities a given individual or community may face likely will shift across these stages, increasing the importance for humanitarian or development policymakers and practitioners to be cognizant of these dynamics.

These categories of understanding how religion may be relevant in a context provide a diagnostic lens through which humanitarian and development actors can evaluate the religious diversity dynamics of a given context in order to understand where and how religious factors may contribute to religious inequalities, that is discrimination, hostility, or violence on account of religious factors (Tadros, 2022). In the following section, we review some well-known development framings and humanitarian approaches, highlighting if and how they engage with the language of religion and belief and inequalities which may arise on account of religious identity, beliefs, or practice. Specifically, we look at the human development approach, horizontal inequalities, capital and asset-based frameworks, the sustainable development goals, and humanitarian response framings. There are two obvious ways in which religion and religious inequality can be ignored: in terms of spiritual values as an essential component of human flourishing; and in terms of group classifications for analysis and policy purposes, particularly as it relates to heightened need or vulnerabilities. We expose the extent of lack of attention to religion and religious inequalities across these two dimensions and consider the implications this has for how development happens on-the-ground – a theme we explore in the case study of Iraq.

2.1. Human development and capabilities approach

Amartya Sen's conception of "development as freedom" evolved into the capability approach, focusing on whether people are free and have the ability to fulfil their wants and needs (Sen, 2001; 2005). This freedom should naturally encompass the freedom to practice one's religion, along with many other axes of freedom. Sen's work provides the philosophical basis for the human development (HD) approach to development. This approach marked a significant shift in development thinking – from a focus on economic growth as the necessary component of development to a people-centred approach that emphasised the quality of people's lives and participatory and inclusive forms of development.

The Human Development Report (HDR) is an independent annually published report (since 1990) commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is a policy hallmark of the HD approach. Its goal is to place people at the centre of the development - process in terms of economic debate, policy and advocacy. The first report defined human development as "both the process of widening people's choices and the level of their achieved wellbeing" (UNDP 1990, p. 9). In other words, the purpose of development in this vision is to enhance people's capabilities across a range of areas. These areas are specifically identified as the economic, social, political and cultural. Religion was not identified as a separate category but was subsumed, somewhat superficially, under the "cultural" area. Since 1990, the report has showcased diverse themes and more than 140 countries have published some 600 national HDRs. Some of these reports have covered religion, but overall, the religious and spiritual dimension to capabilities and quality of life has been afforded minimal attention. Furthermore, while a key contribution of the HD approach has been the development

of non-economic indicators to measure wider aspects of development, most obviously the Human Development Index (HDI),[2] notably absent are indicators associated with religion, faith, ethnicity, or culture.

The religious and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing can be as important as the material dimension. It is primarily in Nussbaum's (2000) elaboration of the capabilities approach that religion and spiritual value is made explicit. She makes strong claims for "the intrinsic value of religious capabilities" (p. 179), saying that to "strike at religion is to risk eviscerating people's moral, cultural, and artistic, as well as spiritual, lives" (p. 180). Clearly, access to material or economic resources is vital for physical survival, spiritual wellbeing, and adherence to certain beliefs. Yet, as shown by Alkire (2002) in a case study of a development project in rural Pakistan, a group of women chose a rose-cultivation project over a higher-income return goat-rearing one on the basis that the spiritual dimension of wellbeing would be more significant from the former. Roses were used in their religious ceremonies, and other benefits included the experience of connecting with the Maker through walking in rose fields.

A significant HD initiative that has shone a partial light on religion and capabilities was the 2000 World Bank's Voices of the Poor study (Narayan et al., 2000) which was informed by primary research using a participatory poverty assessment in 23 countries and through talking to thousands of people living in poverty. The findings showed that religion and spirituality/faith constitute major aspects of people's conception of wellbeing. In addition, it showed that poor people tend to have more trust in religious leaders than political leaders (similarly shown by several social barometers). Through this study and other similar global consultations with organisations such as the UNICEF and UN Women synthesis reports, religion began to be recognised as a critical issue within the realm of development. However, matters of religious inequalities exacerbated by political, economic, ethnic and social factors did not feature in the findings. More recently, in 2004, the HDR focused on cultural liberty, of which faith was a key sub-topic. The report argues that faith is one of the most common reasons for cultural exclusion. Nevertheless, subsequent HD Reports, such as the ones in 2010, 2011 and 2016, mention religion and faith only in passing, if at all.

In an edited volume on the HD and capability approach (2009), just one part of one chapter on culture and religion is devoted to a discussion of religion and the human development approach (evidencing the marginality of this theme within the HD approach). In this chapter, White and Deneulin (2009) argue that various forms of discrimination, including religious, prevent people from fulfilling their wants and needs, which limits their capabilities. Recognising that "religion is often a significant, if not the most foundational part, of people's lives which infuse what they value, who they are and what they do" (p. 268), White et al. argue that it should therefore be considered as a key contributor to wellbeing. They critique how most development models take an instrumental approach to religion, using various religion indicators as variables that impact negatively (and sometimes positively) on a set of goals of development indicators. Similarly, Wilber and Jameson (1980) argue that viewing religion as simply a policy lever to achieve pre-defined goals that are external to the moral fabric of society will jeopardise any development process as it may alienate the people it is attempting to serve. This work has not yet influenced the mainstream regarding development theorising or mainstream policy documents. Nonetheless, there appear to be obvious entry points for bringing considerations of religion into the HD approach. The barriers fundamentally relate to the inability of the paradigm to simultaneously hold competing norms and rights that might, on the one hand, impinge on a person's freedom while, at the same time, providing liberty and increased functioning for another person.

2.2. Inequalities

While most of the religion and development literature is silent on the topic of religious inequalities, one sub-section of the inequalities framing incorporates consideration of religion, namely the horizontal inequalities (HI) literature. As one of the most influential thinkers in this area over the last 20 years, Frances Stewart's novel offering was to highlight and conceptualise the distinction between vertical and horizontal inequalities (as epitomised in her edited volume of 2005). Previously, development theories and measurement had been replete with discussions and measurement of economic inequality as measured by the classic Lorenz curve and Gini coefficient, where analysis of inequality was only ever linked to the "vertical" differences between individuals or households as measured by their income, expenditure or any other measure of accumulated resource (land, assets). Horizontal inequalities, on the other hand, "are inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups" (Stewart 2005, p. 3). For instance, the differences in health or education status of different ethnic groups in any one population might reflect horizontal inequalities in access for these groups to health and education provision. Stewart argues that inequality between groups significantly increases the likelihood of conflict (Stewart, 2005; 2008; 2010). The primary focus of this literature is to show how horizontal inequalities spur conflict and, to a lesser extent, it also looks at how such inequalities may be redressed.

Despite a specific focus on the role of HI in causing and influencing conflict, this work has been influential for development thinkers and practitioners in understanding the role of the social, ethnic, cultural, political and religious in creating and sustaining inequality and deprivation. When Stewart (2008) first introduced salient groupings, she stated that "identities may be framed by religion, ethnic ties, or racial affiliations, or other factors which bind groups of people together" (pp. 12–13). Thus, religion (alongside other identities) is recognised as one obvious axis that can lead to cleavages between groups and resources in any society.

The HI framing embraces religious distinctions conceptually, and analysis of religious groupings is often present in empirical work on horizontal inequalities. For example, Christians and Muslims in Indonesia and Nigeria, Hindus and Muslims in India, and Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (see Diprose, 2011; Stewart, 2008). Yet, despite Stewart's early recognition of these various groupings and distinctions, overall, HI analysis tends to focus more heavily on categories of ethnicity and culture, with "religion" and "religious inequalities" often subsumed under these. Of course, the categories intersect, but it is helpful to name the distinctions when they exist, as the intricate interplay of different identities determines whether specific policies and programmes will be successful.

Moreover, the HI framing attends to religious identity as a source of inequality and illustrates how culturally ascribed religious status can drive inequality. The prominence given to the role of culture in defining group status, perhaps unhelpfully, compounds religion and culture. Similarly, most policy documents, if they consider religious inequality at all, do so as a sub-section of cultural inequality (UNESCO, 2016). Despite some similarities, the conflation of religion and culture is problematic as the former can be based on transcendental fundamentals that cannot be shifted, while culture is a social construct that is more flexible to change (Deneulin and Bano, 2009). In cases where religion does not involve transcendental values but is socially structured, there is still value in distinguishing religion as a separate category – notably, it points to particular types of policies that might otherwise be ignored (for instance, respect for religious holidays and practices).

Irrespective of where one falls on whether religion should be a sub-section of culture, cultural inequality is usually elaborated on with examples other than religion, as was demonstrated in the *2016 World Social Science Report* on inequalities. This report addressed seven main categories of inequalities, one of which is cultural inequality. Despite

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[2] The Human Development Index (HDI) is a statistical composite index of life expectancy, education, and per capita income indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of human development.

including discrimination based on religion under this cultural theme, the issue was not addressed in depth. In total, religion was mentioned just 25 times in the 2016 WSSR, in contrast to disability which was mentioned 49 times and gender more than 250 times. A noteworthy report about religion and inequality comes from the global thematic consultation on the post-2015 development agenda, organised by UNICEF and UN Women. This report is not a policy document but a synthesis report of a global public consultation. The report features religion to a much greater extent than other policy documents reviewed, going as far as to recommend the collection of data on religious and intersectional discrimination.

Many reports that engage with intersecting inequalities typically frame religious inequality as a possible compounding factor. However, few examples of how religious inequality interacts with and reinforces other inequalities are given. This is the case in the 2016 World Social Science Report. Another example is a 2013 report by the UN Economic Commission on Europe (UNECE) that focused specifically on creating an index to measure intersecting inequalities. While this report mentions religion as a possible compounding factor, it is not included in the proposed index. This gives the impression that religion is considered as an afterthought in the intersectionality framework. Furthermore, there exists a handful of influential global reports that do not contain any mention of religion, such as the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)'s *Report on the World Social Situation 2013: Inequality Matters*. The report proposed that to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs and shape a global vision for the development agenda after 2015, stakeholders, along with addressing poverty, needed to tackle inequalities. Vertical inequality related to income, education, health indicators and wealth are discussed in detail, as are some horizontal inequalities related to social groupings such as age, disability, ethnicity and migration status. Yet, there is no mention of religious inequalities.

In summary, while most development literature that addresses horizontal inequalities mentions religion as a possible ground for discrimination, very little elaboration is provided (with the exception of Stewart's work). This lack of attention is in stark contrast with other factors, such as gender, race and disability, which are referred to liberally and considered in some depth.

2.3. Capital and asset-based theories of development

A number of sociologists have sought to explain how different forms of capital and resources produce and reproduce inequality and opportunity. In his classic work on The Forms of Capital (1986), Bourdieu expands the concept of capital to include assets formed by access to culturally valuable symbols, ways of life and social networks. Money carries powerful symbolic properties that confer meaning, dignity and relevance to people's lives (Carruthers and Espeland, 1998). By thinking of worth only as economic value, we overlook (1) other important measures of wealth and (2) "other economically important types of exchange". Bourdieu makes the point that all capitals (social, assets, cultural, symbolic) are, under certain conditions, convertible to economic capital or monetary value. For instance, in the case of status goods for youth, these can be converted into valuable status capital, which facilitates them staying on in school, inclusion in social networks and ultimately, opportunities that convert to economic capital. In the same way, symbolic capital can convert to economic gain, social capital is also convertible. Bourdieu sees social capital as the capital "one gains from personal connections", such as membership in groups, including families, clubs, and solidarity groups. These connections can lead to jobs, loans, valuable contacts and investment opportunities. In other words, they can alleviate material constraints in an indirect way (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 286).

An important contribution of Bourdieu is the realisation that people are motivated by social and psychosocial incentives and constraints as much as by material incentives and constraints. In other words, while

the other capitals might eventually convert to material economic benefits, not all incentives are primarily economically motivated. Even Stewart emphasises this relationship in the HI theory, noting that "one type of capital requires others to be productive" (Stewart, 2005, p. 13). The livelihoods framework is similarly built on the idea that people build and maintain livelihoods across multiple types of capital spheres – economic, social, financial, natural, and human.

But what of religious or spiritual capital, concepts largely overlooked and under-theorised by livelihoods and social capital literature? Bourdieu did, in fact, offer writings on religion (see Verter for a full exposition of this) that contributed significantly to his development of a model for analysing elaborate relational structures in a range of social contexts. Yet, his reflections fell short of developing a theory of "religious capital" or "spiritual capital", primarily because, as highlighted by Verter (2003), he perceived religion almost exclusively in organisational terms based on a view of the "Roman Catholic church as an instrument of oppression and exploitation" (p. 151). This view is "too rigid to account for the fluidities of today's spiritual marketplace" (p. 151). Iannaccone's (1990) model of religious capital is closely aligned with Bourdieu's social capital in that the benefits of participation and membership in religious networks attach to investment, accumulation and profit. For instance, in the sense that adherence to specific religious affiliations or denominations form symbolic capital, such as attendance at a politically established institution (such as the Church of England) or wearing specific religious attire and dress, might convert into certain social or political privileges and economic resources. Verter (2003) similarly attempts to frame spiritual capital in Bourdieuian terms. This is one way of framing the benefits of "religion". Yet religious capital in the form of internally held beliefs and faith systems are unlikely to have standard economic convertibility simply because the incentives for holding these "capitals" are not based upon economic fundamentals but rather on spiritual ones. The fulfilment of wellbeing and needs does not proceed through the standard pathways of economic liberalism and material and consumptive satiation. Rather, the fulfilment is based on "transcendental fundaments" – that is, spirituality that transcends the material realm and enables human flourishing is not able to be tweaked by the classic economic policy levers. These levers implicitly or explicitly rest on the notion of *homo economicus* as well as the convertibility of all capitals to the "economic" (Bourdieu, 1986). The primacy given to the economic in theorising human wellbeing is a key reason why development theories and policies are unable to adequately integrate religion and belief.

2.4. Sustainable development and the Leaving no one behind agenda

In the early 1990s, "sustainable development" emerged as a popular approach for thinking about development (Mitlin, 1992; Rogers et al., 2012). The term sustainable development brings together two very distinct concepts. The first, "development", is frequently understood and measured by growth in national income, the economy, or other socially desirable phenomenon related to material wellbeing. The second, "sustainable", is related to "ecological sustainability" or being environmentally sound. In other words, sustainable development is a process by which economic and social change is also ecologically sustainable.[3] Most recently, the sustainable development paradigm has attracted unprecedented attention as it provides the impetus for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The global political shift from the MDGs (where the focus was on lower-income countries only and targets to grow them out of poverty and low economic growth through investments in education and health) to the SDGs (where the focus is a

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[3] Of course, the notion of sustainable development, particularly when development is assumed to be synonymous with economic growth, has been critiqued as internally inconsistent, but this is not our purpose here (see Lele 1991).

commitment by all countries to simultaneously tackle development and sustainability), marked a significant recognition of the interconnectedness of "the North" and "the South" as well as the ecological with the economic (Sachs, 2012).

Furthermore, a move from the MDGs to the SDGs facilitated an innovation with "the inclusion of the concept of Leaving No One Behind, implying a clear intent to move away from the former approach of picking off the low-hanging fruit" (Stuart and Woodroffe 2016, p. 70).

As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first. (United Nations 2015).

Given the explicit focus on Leave No One Behind in Agenda 2030 (where the SDGs are laid out), one would imagine that religion and beliefs would attract significant airtime, especially as the SDGs form the basis of most current global development policies and programmes. In fact, leaving no one behind implies two things: first, that non-income-based inequalities are tackled (for instance for those facing discrimination through access, social or cultural constraints); and second, that governments and development partners ensure that the most marginalised and excluded groups make progress more quickly than other groups. This would guarantee that the inequality gap is reduced – not just inequality in income but across a range of wellbeing indicators. Agenda 2030 pays attention to gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and a range of other identity indicators correlated with exclusion and marginalisation, yet religion and belief are conspicuously absent. Religion is mentioned only in passing in the "leave no one behind" clause and SDG 10.2 on reducing inequalities, which recognises religion as a possible ground for discrimination. Given this, it is unsurprising that most flagship development programmes that ground their vision in Agenda 2030 do not take religion into account beyond vowing not to discriminate on religious grounds and engaging religious leaders and organisations to further the SDGs. While the latter is already an improvement, Agenda 2030 does not suggest a path or a development initiative for development organisations to address religion as a basis of exclusion and discrimination. As Winkler and Satterthwaite (2017) point out, despite possibilities for better data, the stated SDG indicators do not yet provide a means to measure whether religious or ethnic identity factors are addressed in seeking to leave no one behind.

As pointed out by Lele over 20 years ago, "the proponents of sustainable development are faced with a dilemma that affects any program of political action and social change: the dilemma between the urge to take strong stands on fundamental concerns and the need to gain wide political acceptance and support" (Lele 1991, p. 618). While the Leave No One Behind agenda recognises that people face different forms of inequality beyond those related to income, which influence their experiences of poverty, the ideology framing the SDGs is still fundamentally neoliberal, with economic growth and income indicators as the gold standard measure. It would be naïve to assume that governments and global actors, by virtue of signing up to the SDGs, now universally embrace the embedding of religion and religious equality within their development policies. There are political, territorial, and ideological reasons why considerations of religious equality are not given a good airing (See Tadros and Sabates-Wheeler, 2020, for a fuller exposition of these reasons).

There are also practical reasons related to the difficulties of evaluating and measuring religion and belief which limit the potential to define efficient indicators for these. Gough and McGregor (2007) argue that religion is not traditionally included in wellbeing indicators as it cannot be expressed in economic terms. In addition, religion is a relatively ill-defined social category and is, therefore difficult to assess and observe. Deneulin and Rakodi (2011) argue that religion should largely be analysed through discourse as it changes and is multidimensional. However, discourse analysis is not traditionally used to inform mainstream development policy. For this reason, it would be beneficial to create wellbeing indicators that also portray religious dimensions, like religious discrimination. While important, this is complicated by the overall lack of data on religion. Stewart and others note the implications of the dearth of statistics on inequalities in well-known datasets from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the World Bank, though noting some limited exceptions, such as Demographic and Health Surveys, which have proved valuable despite covering only a limited number of countries (Stewart, 2010a, 2010b, pp. 18–19). What is needed to measure religion-related discrimination and inequalities is, first and foremost, disaggregated data on religious affiliation. This may be complicated in terms of the sensitivities related to gathering such information, but it is not methodologically complicated.

2.5. Humanitarian principles and the nexus approach

Similar to how religious inequalities have been absent from development framings and approaches, humanitarian actors, too, have until recently considered these issues irrelevant at best, if not an outright hindrance (Khalaf-Elledge, 2020; Wilkinson, 2020). Wilkinson and Eggert (2021) provide evidence that this has slowly started to change. From the early 2000s, some researchers, practitioners, and policymakers began to pay increasing attention to the role of religion and religious actors in humanitarian response and development initiatives (Ver Beek, 2000). This increase in attention can be supported by the Humanitarian Charter and Protection Principles, which begin with "the fundamental moral principle of humanity: that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Based on this principle, we affirm the primacy of the humanitarian imperative: that action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict, and that nothing should override this principle" (Sphere Project 2018, p. 28). These core ideas are further elaborated in the protection principles, specifically, "Protection Principle 1: Enhance people's safety, dignity and rights and avoid exposing them to further harm: Humanitarian actors take steps to reduce overall risks and vulnerability of people, including to the potentially negative effects of humanitarian programmes." Delivering on humanitarian principles would necessitate considering these forms of discrimination in society, as times of crisis often exacerbate existing inequalities or vulnerabilities. Rohwerder and Szyp (2022) state: "the same structures and systems that make ethnic and religious minorities vulnerable and exposed can leave them marginalised or excluded from the humanitarian response during crises. These include: their marginalised social position; the location of their homes; their vulnerable occupations; the nature of their housing; and the language they speak. Intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination, where ethnic- and religious-based discrimination crosses with gender, age and (dis)ability, leave some people even more acutely at risk and excluded" (p. 34).

While humanitarian principles provide a foundation for how humanitarian aid programs ought to operate based on equal dignity and rights, they do not provide insight into whether such programs would see it within their mandate to account for, or proactively engage with, issues of inequality that may be present within a given society. Furthermore, they do not explicitly address the specific challenges that religious minorities face in humanitarian settings (Allouche, Hoffler and Lind, 2020). The lack of attention to specifics in the framing of humanitarian response translates into limited attention to how programming could be adapted to take issues related to religious discrimination and belief into account "to reduce the overall risks and vulnerability of people" (Avis, 2019; Tadros and Sabates-Wheeler, 2020; Wilkinson and Eggert, 2021).

As Wilkinson and Eggert (2021) state in their review of guidance for the inclusion of religious diversity in humanitarian responses, "The irony is that, although humanitarian definitions of inclusivity, vulnerability, and impartiality often mention religious identity in passing (alongside gender, age, race, ethnicity, politics, and other aspects of

identity), there is almost no guidance as to how to include it" (p. 20). Ideally, both humanitarian principles and "development" principles are universal and should form part of a continuum of response. Still, there are circumstances under which they seem to conflict — for example, remaining neutral vs deliberately empowering vulnerable groups, which clearly involves elevating the rights one group vis-a'-vis repression from others. "This tension can broaden the gap between emergency response and longer-term development" (Maxwell, 1999, p. 381). However, the more frequent situation is that in any crisis setting (be it an emergency response to a natural disaster or a protracted conflict crisis), there will be myriad responses, including both development and humanitarian actors and objectives, sometimes overlapping and blending into each other, sometimes competing, and sometimes contradicting.

In recent years, there has been much talk of a nexus approach to development, where "nexus" is commonly understood as the intersection between development and humanitarian approaches and interventions that have historically remained siloed and working at times alongside, yet in tension with each other (Howe, 2019). Less common but now gaining traction is the concept of a "triple" nexus, where an agenda for peacebuilding must complement humanitarian and development approaches, particularly in the contexts of protracted conflict and displacement (Howe, 2019). The relevance and potential contribution of a nexus approach is evident, especially when considering the increasing complexities of crises and the overlay of emergencies onto longer-term development programming in many protracted crisis settings.

So, while there is a distinctiveness about the humanitarian approach, as defined by the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality, in practice, many of the development approaches and framings still apply in crisis settings and are to varying degrees used in humanitarian response. For instance, "vulnerability" is a concept used widely to distinguish different groups with different needs; livelihoods and resilience are framings frequently drawn upon to frame interventions; inclusion, equality and rights-based approaches are used to justify targeting responses; and the "do no harm" and protection focussed approaches are all apparent in humanitarian response (Carter, 2021). The Do No Harm (DNH) framework is a foundational concept for humanitarian approaches, especially in relation to promoting conflict sensitivity. Frazer and Friedli (2015) adapt this framework to equip practitioners in engaging with religious dynamics. They emphasise that the way in which a practitioner thinks about religion is of critical importance, and thus, a measure of reflexivity is necessary, and steps to develop religious literacy and competency may be of particular value (Seiple and Hoover, 2021).

Despite the lack of attention given to religion and religious inequalities in development and humanitarian framings, as shown above, we argue that approaches to development and humanitarian response must consider religious inequality and diversity, "as the dynamics between different religious and secular groups has a clear impact on the needs of people of various faiths (and none)" (Wilkinson and Eggert, 2021). Research indicates that navigating such issues in all contexts, particularly conflict situations, is complex and challenging with multiple trade-offs involved (Desportes 2019). The next section of this paper explores these tensions in the case of a humanitarian and development response in Iraq. As will be shown, where religion and religious inequalities are a clear and present reality on the ground, they must be considered alongside all other sociocultural factors affecting people. In contexts such as Iraq, it is crucial to address the perception that secular approaches are "neutral". Ignoring or overlooking the dynamics of religious inequality can potentially increase risks and unintentionally worsen religious inequalities on the ground.

3. Engaging with religious Inequalities: Concepts and framings in action in Iraq

In the summer of 2014, conflict in Iraq displaced nearly 2 million

people within a matter of weeks, following attacks on Mosul and then to surrounding areas of northern and central Iraq. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principles issued an L3 system-wide activation on August 12 – the highest level of international humanitarian response. As the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) noted in the Humanitarian Needs Overview issued in September 2014:

"The ongoing conflict has displaced over 1.8 million people and *exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities* throughout the country. The historical waves of conflict dating from 1991, the highly scattered nature of displacement in Iraq, combined with the *complex ethno-sectarian drivers of the conflict*, presents a challenge for humanitarian actors to *equitably meet assistance needs and achieve effective protection monitoring* across the whole of Iraq" (UN OCHA 2014, p. 1).

Noted at the very outset of this humanitarian emergency was how the humanitarian response would necessarily be shaped by "pre-existing vulnerabilities" and "complex ethno-sectarian drivers of the conflict," which would be directly relevant for meeting humanitarian and protection needs.

The attacks of 2014, which included explicit targeting of religious minority communities, did not emerge spontaneously, but "even before ISIS's depredations, the situation of Iraq's minorities was precarious as they suffered from various forms of political, economic, and social exclusion as well as targeted violence and persecution, particularly for those living in the Ninewa Plain and the territories disputed between the Kurdish authorities and the federal government" (Minority Rights Group International et al., 2017). Three major communal groups account for approximately 90 per cent of the population: Arab Shi'a, Arab Sunni, and Kurd. These standard labels are themselves an alternation between religious distinction (Sunni and Shi'a) and ethnicity (Kurd and Arab). Each of these groupings also contains significant internal diversity and intra and inter-group contestation has created a particular type of sectarian state (Dodge, 2003; Haddad, 2014; Haddad, 2020; Dodge and Mansour, 2020). In addition to the majority groups, there are a wide array of other religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups, including Christians (400,000–600,000), Kaka'i (110,000–200,000), Shabak (200,000–500,000), Turkmen (500,000–600,000), Yazidis (500,000), and others such as Baha'i and Sabean Mandaean, with population estimates based on pre-June 2014 (Minority Rights Group International et al., 2017).

The religious diversity dynamics (RDD) in Iraq includes distinct religious communities as broad as Muslim, Christian, Yazidi, Kaka'i, Zoroastrian, but also the intracommunal and intersecting identity factors of religious denominations (e.g., Chaldean Catholic, Syriac Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Protestant) and ethno-religious identity (e.g., Sunni Arab, Sunni Turkoman, Sunni Shabak, and Sunni Kurd). These factors inform not merely religious beliefs or worship preferences in religious rituals but, as described above in Petri (2019) and Frazer and Friedli (2015), profoundly influence social, cultural, political, and security concerns, particularly so in the case of Iraq. These religious diversity dynamics can become a crucial factor contributing to a sense of exclusion or discrimination, a form of religious inequality that shapes individual's and communities' relationship to the state and society and overlapping with other factors and forms of marginalisation or discrimination (Salloum 2017; Tadros, Shahab and Quinn-Graham 2022).

As noted in the 2015 UK government's case for assistance, "As ISIL advanced across Iraq, ethnic and religious minority groups were singled out for particularly brutal treatment, and reporting indicates widespread violations of International Humanitarian Law by all parties to the conflict, including horrific reports of targeting of civilians and sexual and

gender-based violence by ISIL and other armed groups" (UK DFID 2015).[4] The political exclusion of the Sunni population prior to the conflict was a significant contributor to the conflict dynamics, creating a "fertile ground for the rise of ISIL in Iraq" (UK DFID 2014). Yet, it was not only that political exclusion of one community played a contributing role as a driver of the conflict, the exclusion or marginalisation of other religious communities, particularly ethnic and religious minorities, led to increased vulnerabilities. This included targeted violence and destruction of religious and cultural heritage sites, elevated protection concerns, and large-scale displacement that amplified humanitarian needs and hindered or slowed their recovery (Isakhan and Shahab 2022, IOM Iraq 2021, Salloum 2020, Johansen, Palani, and Ala'Aldeen 2020, Corticelli 2022).

As this most basic of sketches illustrates, the religious diversity of a situation and its implications for the relationship with the state and between diverse communities can be significant for understanding the context of humanitarian response and designing and delivering interventions.

3.1. How do framings play out on the ground?

In evaluating the framing and objectives of humanitarian assistance to Iraq, a primary theme that emerges is that assistance in responses to humanitarian need was particularly focused on reaching "the most vulnerable groups," "vulnerable populations," and reducing the "excess vulnerability" of conflict-affected groups.

Given the scale of the humanitarian crisis, this emphasis reflects a focus on addressing particular needs in application of the humanitarian principles framework noted above. Across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 business cases for UK humanitarian assistance, vulnerable groups were mentioned more than 75 times. Identifying what constitutes vulnerabilities, then, is essential for assessing the objectives of the programs. More than two dozen illustrative examples of vulnerable groups were given throughout these documents, such as those with disabilities, survivors of sexual violence, children, women and girls, female-headed households, families with special needs, single elderly individuals, those with chronic diseases, those in hard-to-reach areas, or conflict affected groups. All of these are significant potential characteristics that might lead to increased vulnerabilities, yet noticeably absent from these descriptions is the recognition that religious or ethnic identity may also be a factor for vulnerability. In only one instance was religious or ethnic identity mentioned (namely Sunni Arab IDPs). However, there was no explicit consideration that targeting religious communities for violence on account of religious belief or identity – actions recognised as genocide by numerous bodies – may be a factor for increased vulnerability. Neither was the impact of the precarious situation for these communities, including forms of social and political exclusion, explicitly considered.

The case was similar within the Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The 2015 HRP opens:

> "The humanitarian crisis in Iraq is a protection crisis. The ISIL insurgency is one of the most brutal in the world. Populations have been subjected to mass executions, systematic rape and horrendous acts of violence, including executions and torture. Children have been used as suicide bombers and human shields, sold at markets, killed by crucifixion and buried alive. Women and girls have been enslaved and subjected to grotesque sexual violence. The survivors of gender and sexual-based violence are suffering trauma and depression, and suicides have risen sharply, particularly among women and girls. Civilians who have remained in ISIL areas have been targeted,

and are at risk of reprisal and retribution by combatants as they retake territory from ISIL." (UN OCHA 2015a, p. 7)

It rightly notes some severe forms of violence that affected various populations and specific groups, such as gender and sexual-based violence against women and girls or the use of children as suicide bombers and human soldiers. But, again, there is no mention of the identity factors of religious or ethnic communities and explicit targeting of communities. Throughout the HRP, despite numerous descriptions of various types of targeted assistance, ethno-religious dynamics are not mentioned. Corticelli (2022) provides a poignant example of the Kaka'i community, including many living in Khanaqin, an area in the political and security vacuum of territories disputed between the Baghdad and Erbil governorates. When ISIS attacked these areas, the homes and mosques of Arab communities were largely left untouched, yet the homes and temples in Kaka'i villages were completely destroyed. Additionally, the legacy of repression and persecution of the Kaka'i by the Iraqi government further sowed seeds of distrust for whether security forces, including the *Hashd al-*Shaabi militias, could be trusted or if this would be yet another wave of brutal violence against their community. The protection needs for this community were specifically amplified on account of their religious identity, a non-Muslim, religious minority without formal recognition from the Baghdad government and one that has been subjected not only to current but historical forms of persecution and repression from successive governments and non-state actors. The story could be repeated for Yazidis, Christians, and other religious and ethnic minority communities.

The Protection Cluster strategic plan outlines its caseload targeting priorities, noting the geographic emphasis on areas heavily affected by conflict or high concentrations of displaced persons, along with the focus that "specialised protection services will address the needs of girls, boys, women, persons with disabilities, survivors of violence, the elderly and others with serious protection needs" (UN OCHA 2015a: 26). An objective of the protection cluster as a first-line response is to support population profiling and identification of vulnerable individuals, and as a second-line response to support registration and collection of disaggregated data (UN OCHA 2015a, pp. 27-28). While several potential vulnerability categories are mentioned, these religious identity factors are not mentioned. While it could be assumed that the particular needs of religious or ethnic communities targeted for violence would be addressed within this framework, it is not explicitly addressed as an objective nor noted in the related indicators.

The 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan notes a concern about "sectarian violence" and its impact on division among communities and damage to national reconciliation, and how it presents a challenge in areas of return (UN OCHA 2015c, p. 4, 11). The Protection Cluster section of the HRP also highlights the importance of evidence-based advocacy and specialised assistance according to specific needs. Accounting for these needs requires "collecting, analysing and reporting on critical information related to people in need, including disaggregated data, and identification of vulnerable individuals for targeted assistance" (p. 30). Again, this shows awareness of the need for increased understanding and granular data to deliver on the protection needs of those most at risk. However, how religious dynamics might inform those responses is omitted.

This absence aligns with the observations of Wilkinson and Eggert (2021) in their assessment of the inclusion of religious diversity in humanitarian response broadly, where they found that while there is a significant focus on inclusion in humanitarian response, particularly actors within the protection cluster, it very rarely explicitly acknowledges inclusion of religious diversity or provides guidance on how it is to be addressed. These are not merely theoretical concerns, but as one country director during the Iraq response described, "The humanitarian response plan is my song sheet. And it is how I play my cards so that I can hopefully get the right dance partner and funding." The framing of issues and the attention given to specific to issues within the HRP ends up

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having a crucial real-world impact on how interventions are designed, which issues are highlighted, what locations are included, what funds are made available and ultimately which programs can be implemented.

The implications of these dynamics are not marginal but have a significant bearing on the central aim of many assistance and recovery efforts. Failing to consider these dynamics runs the risk of overlooking and failing to address the needs of vulnerable individuals and communities or, more worryingly, may further exacerbate divisions. As an IOM-commissioned study in 2020 found, following the military recapture of areas from ISIS, more than 1.7 million IDPs had returned. Yet, the rates of return were disproportionately low for Yazidis and Christians in comparison to other communities (Salloum 2020). Despite the heightened social tensions that are present between religious communities, it is also possible for religious traditions and practices to contribute in positive ways to the development of everyday peace (Bourhrous and O'Driscoll, 2023).

Absent a clear understanding of these dynamics, assistance efforts and resources may unintentionally contribute to repressive power dynamics or increasing factors of marginalisation. A case in point– one interviewee from the Yazidi community recalled how an international NGO established a bakery to train displaced Yazidi women, but the managers they hired were not Yazidis, and those managers refused to eat the food made by the hands of Yazidis, adding to increased tensions between communities. Ultimately, a Yazidi organisation set up its own bakery training centre, which continues to run successfully and has become a means of empowerment and means for moving past discrimination.

Conversely, a failure to account for community dynamics may lead to perceptions of favouritism or overemphasis on one community to the exclusion of others. This may exacerbate tensions in program implementation if there is insufficient whole community buy-in. An anecdote was shared from a project seeking to dig a new well provide water to newly returned Sunni Arab families in Sinjar, a predominately Yazidi area. The communal tensions, still very fraught due to incidents of betrayal between some Sunnis and Yazidis in 2014, were exacerbated by the project and initially resulted in the new borehole being blocked by the community. While the dynamics of the relationship between the different religious communities may not have been the only factor at play, it was a critical factor that needed to be considered for the successful implementation of the program.

In reflecting on vulnerability assessments during the Iraq response, an experienced protection specialist remarked on the importance of looking at the full range of vulnerabilities and considering the operational context and what factors require sensitivity. Understanding how the dynamics of identity (whether religious, ethnic, or otherwise) contribute to vulnerabilities and risks for particular individuals and communities must become a central facet in designing and evaluating assistance efforts, not only as an immediate factor but also considering root and structural causes that may increase needs or limit access to protection or other forms of assistance. As a long-time humanitarian practitioner noted, "I think that there is a growing sense of the need for any humanitarian response not to look at vulnerability as just black and white, but to look at vulnerability and special vulnerability groups and that can include awareness of the religious minorities within that awareness.".

Additionally, assistance providers have the potential to either strengthen or undermine existing community institutions, including those local faith-based actors whose established presence in the communities often enables them to be effective in providing contextualized ongoing assistance to those in need. One interviewee highlighted how a "Big Aid" operation can steamroll these actors or can collaborate with them and strengthen those who often are strategically positioned to provide ongoing assistance and navigate the complex dynamics required to assist the most vulnerable. Intentionally evaluating how to strategically engage local faith actors as partners can serve as one important tactic for addressing the underlying dynamics of religious inequalities.

Considering the current state of humanitarian practice and the challenges toward adjusting norms, another interviewee expressed that "what we need people to do is to ask, *what is your operational context and what do you need to be sensitive to*?" In response to this, lessons can be drawn from an analogous challenge – the approach to gender mainstreaming. The 2015 Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund Annual Report notes that all 38 projects funded included an intentional focus on gender equality. Gender and age analysis were included in needs assessments and further reflected in the design of project activities and outcomes (UN OCHA 2015b, p. 19). Would it be possible to evaluate whether this same level of attention was given to religious diversity dynamics and the impact of them on needs and vulnerabilities? Based on the currently available data, it is impossible to answer what percentage of programs, if any, included analysis of these dynamics and if this informed activities and outcomes. This data simply was not collected or communicated. While significant work remains to be done with regard to gender sensitivity, this example of explicit project-level analysis, supported by contextually appropriate, disaggregated data, represents one strategy which could be adopted to integrate increased awareness of religious diversity dynamics as a component of the analysis, design, implementation, and analysis. Taking this step would require an intentional effort by assistance actors to monitor these dynamics within planning, monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

There are some examples of research efforts to develop greater awareness of these dynamics in Iraq, although many of these surfaced over five years after the initial displacement (IOM Iraq, 2019; IOM Iraq, 2021). In their efforts to effectively design and monitor the impacts of programs, a humanitarian response researcher in Iraq expressed: "We are interested in what unites them, but also what divides them. In the case of Iraq this happens to be religion, but at times it comes out of ethnicity or tribal affiliation." Sensitivity to the religious diversity dynamics is not about privileging a particular religious community or belief system, but it is about understanding how these dynamics influence the context in which assistance efforts are being implemented. In reflecting on these dynamics in practice, one Iraqi program officer from a UN Agency shared an anecdote about shelter provision where he believed that aid was bypassing religious minorities. He remembered advocating to his superiors that the assistance should be for "the most vulnerable people in this crisis. It is not because of their beliefs or religions, but because of their vulnerability." His plea for increased assistance for a specific religious community was not based on their religious identity, but on observing the specific impacts that the crisis had on the community and ensuring the responses were in line with those realities.

4. Conclusions

The exploration of a range of influential development and humanitarian frameworks in this paper shows very clearly the extent to which these paradigms have not, and in many cases cannot, accommodate themes of religious inequalities and diversity. Despite the fact that recent framings have made significant efforts to include consideration of historically excluded and vulnerable groups (such as those with disabilities, children, refugees, women and older people), religion, religious inequalities and faith have been absent from explicit incorporation into most development frameworks. Exceptions are the HD approach (that occasionally encompasses spiritual values) and the HI approach (that identifies religious, and sometimes ethnic groupings). However, in the main, mention of religious-inspired forms of exclusion are largely superficial. The same can be said of ethnic and racial distinctions and inequalities. This has resulted in the policy and programmatic outworkings of theoretical paradigms that have meant that many people have been unintentionally, and sometimes intentionally, excluded from participation in and benefits from development processes. For these people and groups the frameworks are not fit for purpose.

We have argued that, despite some progress towards adopting a more

holistic approach (e.g., the Leaving No one Behind approach), a substantial challenge facing well-established development and humanitarian response frameworks is their implicit acceptance of the economic as the dominant measure for development success. For example, the livelihood capitals and assets that people own can be used for, and converted to, the accumulation of economic capital. We have made the claim that this type of model is only minimally useful for considerations of religion. The religious, specifically spiritual, dimension is not always convertible to the economic–- it can be private, and not understandable to all those trying to engage with it. By nature, then, this makes it a very different "capital" and for this reason it cannot easily be incorporated into current framings. The understanding of religion or faith as capital, or spiritual capital, is critical for understanding religious minorities' coping strategies when faced with religious-inspired forms of exclusion and targeting. For example, when faced with discrimination or even persecution, how does their religious or spiritual capital affect their choice of responses: does it inspire resistance, subversion, accommodation or "cacoonization"? Or a response of finding solace in one's own community's heritage while assuming a minimal role in broader public good? And what influences those interfaces between human agency and reacting or coping with religious inspired exclusion? Understanding the impact in the economic, social, and political spheres that come on account of culturally defined groups, including religious communities, should be of profound interest for development practitioners. Yet, despite the possibilities this perspective can unlock, religious inequalities have suffered from neglect in most mainstream development policy and practice.

The case study from Iraq illustrates the serious consequences of neglecting religion and religious inequalities in development and humanitarian approaches. The religious diversity dynamics and the related religious inequalities of the country profoundly shape the challenges facing individuals and communities in a time of crisis. The conflict was shaped by the "pre-existing vulnerabilities", in particular those which left religious and ethnic minorities vulnerable to security threats and in need of targeted assistance. Yet, in policy and in practice, there was a limited acknowledgement of the religious dynamics in the data which informs vulnerability assessments, protection needs, or program design and evaluation.

An important step in integrating religious inequalities into development frameworks and the practices which flow from them will be to ensure that religious inequalities and diversity dynamics are included within the conflict and context assessment tools utilized by practitioners. Crucially, this is not only about the relationship between violent actors, but how the lived experiences of various religious communities are impacted by a given crisis or conflict. A related measure is to explicitly include religious identity as a potential vulnerability indicator alongside other risk factors. In order to do this effectively it will require improved collection of disaggregated data, which must be done sensitively, but is possible –and in many cases may already even be included on national identity cards or made evident through family or tribal names. These potential risk factors then can be incorporated into program design, applying a religion-sensitive approach to implementation and informing monitoring and evaluation efforts to understand the impact of interventions on the most vulnerable. As one protection advisor noted, when nuanced data on the social and contextual dynamics was available a context analysis could be developed that was deeply grounded in the community. This provided a deeper understanding of barriers that would arise with particular religious communities, such as specific concerns around girls access to school, including harassment they might face as a religious minority. These concerns could then be taken into account leading to more effective outcomes as a result.

The topic of religion "remain[s] a challenge for development for [it] expose[s] the fragility of any conception of development with universalistic aspirations, and the complexities of the strive for human flourishing" (Deneulin and Bano, 2009, p. 269). Most development

approaches include considerations of religion in an instrumentalist way by using various "religion indicators" as variables that impact negatively (and sometimes positively) on a set of goals of development indicators. Viewing religion simply as a policy lever to achieve pre-defined goals that are external to the moral fabric of society will jeopardise any development process as it may alienate the people it is attempting to serve. For individuals and communities across the world – Iraq included – religious inequalities are a central factor driving the needs and risks of the most vulnerable and need to be a key consideration for all those seeking to assist those in need. In the global effort of redressing inequalities, religious inequalities should not be ignored.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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No data was used for the research described in the article.

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