Faith-Based Non-Governmental Organizations: Harmful or Helpful?

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ABSTRACT
Non-governmental organizations or NGOs are often seen as the best way in which to pursue development, and are commonly thought to be objective third parties in international relations. However, NGOs are far from objective parties, and have their private agendas that they seek to pursue. This paper explores the growing role of faith-based NGOs in developing nations through a literature review of relevant sources. The definition of what is a faith-based organization is examined in terms of the aid given and the way in which it is distributed. Examples of the various roles of faith-based NGOs, whether this be in working closely with local peoples to deliver more efficient aid, or in situations where the distribution of aid was impacted based on religious views of those in need. Special consideration is given to the ways in which faith-based NGOs impact the distribution of aid was impacted based on religious views of those in need. Specia

METHODS
Through a literature review, this essay looked to examine the definition of NGO and faith-based NGO, and their impact on development in the nations of the Global South. A number of databases, such as Scholars Portal and JSTOR, were used to access articles published on this topic. The texts found were further examined to ensure that they came from peer-reviewed journals, and best represented the topic. These articles were then compared to gain a fuller understanding of what an NGO is, how a faith-based NGO may differ, and how these organizations interact with theories of development and post-development.

NGO/FBNGO
Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs are coming to play an increasing role in the deployment of international aid and the provision of services in developing nations. Non-governmental organizations are seen by many as an objective third party with the local relations necessary to get aid to those who need it most. However, it is commonly overlooked that NGOs are in fact private organizations that are commonly run similarly to a business and may have their own objectives in providing aid to developing nations. Faith-Based NGOs are still more complicated to define, and are commonly considered to be any organization “that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the teaching and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within faith” (Clarke and Jennings p. 6). Different scales have been created to define just how important faith is within an NGO, from only a founding principle, to something that defines every interaction with development. The figure below shows the top receivers of voluntary aid from a disaster relief event, and clearly shows that faith-based NGOs are coming to play an important role in the distributing aid.

HARMFUL IMPACTS
Some of the greatest controversy surrounding evangelism in faith-based NGOs are around the actions of faith-based organizations acting in Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami. In 2005 it was brought to the public’s attention that some Christian evangelical groups were attempting to bring the Christian religion to children. A project called the Child Survival Project was able to vaccinate more than two million children, and provide much needed information to help parents deal with common issues such as diarrhea.

CONCLUSIONS
While some forms of development, including the elimination of extreme poverty and major diseases such as AIDS and malaria are worthy goals, development must be changed to become more inclusive of all cultures and their knowledge and beliefs. This would require a move from development theory into the world of post-development, which rejects the Western ideal of development, and seeks instead to incorporate other forms of knowledge and more grassroots operations (Escobar). One can only hope that in the future, more sustainable and integrative forms of development can gain hold, that allow all nations to prosper without a focus on Western ideals of development as modernization.