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Beyond Western Approaches: Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) and Faith in the Development and Humanitarian Sector

There is an increasing awareness of the contribution of faith actors to development and humanitarian action, which goes hand in hand with a recognition that international secular approaches are not always suited for engagements with local faith communities. While other areas of faith and development/humanitarian aid have received increased attention in recent years, we still know relatively little about Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) and faith. Based on 31 in-depth interviews with (secular and faith-based) development/humanitarian practitioners, academics and local faith actors, this paper discusses challenges and opportunities of international MEAL practices in partnerships with faith actors. While Western approaches dominate most contemporary debates on MEAL and faith, this paper includes Western and non-Western organisations from a range of different faith traditions. It shows that not all faith actors in development and humanitarian aid practice Western forms of MEAL and not all see a need to change that, as they have developed other forms of accountability, learning, and the sharing of experiences that are rooted in their faith tradition. The paper therefore aims to contribute to a normalisation of decolonised approaches in the sector, with a view to unsettling existing power dynamics and helping redefine what is important and who determines it as such within the context of MEAL.

Keywords: development and humanitarian sector, international secular approaches, local faith communities, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)