

ENGAGING WITH FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Understanding the key role that faith-based organizations play at the global, regional and local levels, UN Environment supports the UN-wide task force on Religion and Development. UN Environment is taking the lead in establishing an innovative strategy to engage and partner with faith-based organizations to deliver on Agenda 2030. The strategy builds on the 5 principles (People living on a healthy Planet, enjoying Prosperity and Partnerships in Peaceful societies), with three overarching goals: 1) Leadership for policy impact; 2) Financing to support SDGs; and 3) Knowledge-based decision support system. The three goals will largely depend on mobilizing local communities; co-ordinating communications and advocacy; fostering south-south cooperation; engaging in faith-Environment thematic conversations and empowering UN Environment corporate engagement.

***UN
Environment
Strategy***

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Executive Summary

The global Agenda 2030 can only be achieved by engaging and empowering stakeholders, mobilizing partnerships and engaging untapped innovative approaches. While it is widely acknowledged that the role of civil society and non-government organization is crucial, the full spectrum of such organizations has not been adequately addressed including those organizations based on faith, values, culture and indigenous knowledge. Building on the cultural diversity is significant and fulfills the fourth dimension of sustainable development as called for in Rio Summits. Traditional stakeholder's engagement strategies have been effective to a limited scale requiring new creative, inspiring and innovative actions bringing like-minded networks to support the implementation of the global Agenda at all levels.

Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) have been recognized by the UN system as key and important players in eradicating poverty, improving people's health, protecting the environment and thus achieving sustainable development. Citizens see in such organizations as being trustworthy and highly networked with dynamism that enables them to operate and achieve on the ground results where and when needed. Spiritual values for more than 80% of the people living on earth have been driving individual behaviors. In many countries, spiritual beliefs and religion are main drivers for cultural values, social inclusion, political engagement, and economic prosperity. Utilizing the dynamics of these beliefs at the local level and the role of faith actors is crucial for sustainable development. Conserving the environment has not been absent from the focus of faith-based organizations. In fact, our research revealed that more than 190 environmental faith-based organizations have been working at the global, regional and local levels in addressing climate change, energy conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity, and reforestation, among others.

For UN Environment, the integrated approach should facilitate the integration of religious and cultural values to ensure inclusive green and transformative development through adopting lifestyles that are informed by faith-based values and behaviors to achieve sustainable consumption and production. The integrated approach coupled with cultural and religious values can promote innovative nature-based solutions, respect for traditional and indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity, exercise environmental stewardship and duty of care. This coupling of environmental sustainability and duty of care can be the corner stone for a common vision that enhances the role of religion and culture in achieving sustainability. For this purpose, UN Environment is launching a global initiative to strategically engage with faith-based organizations with a mission to *"To Encourage, Empower and Engage with Faith-Based Organizations as partners, at all levels, toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling Agenda 2030."* To be able to do so, the organization will engage with faith-based organizations to realize an impact on local communities sustainable livelihoods based on common spiritual values. The Strategy focuses on mobilizing faith-based investments in supporting SDGs implementation while greening their assets and providing the needed knowledge for effective messages of faith leaders with decision makers and the general public. The three overarching goals of the strategy relate to 1) Leadership for policy impact; 2) Green Faith-Based Financing to achieve the SDGs; and 3) Knowledge-based decision support system. The three goals will largely depend on mobilizing local *communities*; communications and advocacy; south-south cooperation; faith-Environment thematic conventions and empowering UN Environment corporate engagement.

Mission

"To Encourage, Empower and Engage with Faith-Based Organizations as partners, at all levels, toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling Agenda 2030."

Vision

"A world where everything is in balance"

Values: CREATION

Communicate: Communicate effectively to engage all stakeholders.

Respect: Respect all spiritual and religious beliefs.

Empower: Empower and engage with all stakeholders.

Act: Act in ways that reflect individual and communal beliefs.

Transform: Transform people's behavior through their spiritual values.

Inspire: Inspire innovative approaches to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Organize: Organize knowledge and other resources for efficient timely results.

Network: Network with the UN system and like-minded organizations.

Introduction and Background

The Agenda 2030 five “P” principles of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships are envisioned as an overarching strategy to mobilize global action towards sustainable development. It is widely acknowledged that partnerships are important for the implementation of the Agenda, especially by engaging and empowering all stakeholders. While it is a global Agenda, it also acknowledges and respects the diversity of capacities, policies and priorities, bringing together governments (at all levels) as partners with the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors. Partnerships are intended to mobilize creative approaches, inspire actions, create innovative financing, cultivate existing science along with indigenous knowledge, and engage like-minded networks to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) have been recognized by the UN system as key players in eradicating poverty, improving people’s health, protecting the environment and thus working toward sustainable development. More than 190 environmental faith-based organizations have been addressing climate change, energy conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity, and reforestation, among others things, working at the global, regional and local levels.¹

The UN Inter-agency Task Force on Religion and Development (UN IATF-FBOs) was officially established in 2010 and is composed of 19 UN organizations, including UN Environment. The main objectives of the inter-agency task force are to facilitate knowledge exchange; provide a resource pool of experiences; and strengthen partnerships with faith-based organizations. UN Environment has convened and conducted a number of important initiatives and conventions in partnership with faith-based organizations². The last of which was organized on 30 November 2017 in Nairobi specifically to discuss this strategy.

For centuries, faith-based organizations have provided socio-economic services to local communities, especially for poor and marginalized people. In some societies, political and religious leadership is combined in both formal and informal ways. Spiritual values for more than 80% of the people living on earth have been driving individual behaviors. Citizens see in faith-based organizations as being trustworthy and highly networked organizations with dynamism that enables them to operate and achieve on the ground results where and when needed. These organizations respond to the needs as well as the values of the communities’ they serve. In so doing, they have built credibility through delivering services in the areas of welfare, education, health, and disaster relief among others. In many countries, spiritual beliefs

¹ The list of these environmental faith-based organizations has been compiled (by UN Environment and by environmental faith-based organizations that participated in the strategy consultation meeting held in Nairobi on 20 November 2017). The list describes their focus, religious connection and objectives. However, environment is also part of other faith-based organizations with broader focus. Such organizations have also been collected.

² For UN Environment, cooperation with Faith-based Organizations dates back to 1986, when the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment (IPE) was created to initially inform North American congregations about the serious environmental problems facing life on Earth. The publication “Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action”, published in 2000, highlighted the critical environmental issues confronting humankind at the beginning of a new millennium and UN efforts to address them. In June 2011, UN Environment hosted an event organized by the Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI), the All Africa Churches Conference (AACC) and the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) to discuss the position of faith groups on the environment and humanity, in particular climate change and its effects on Africa. In 2016, UN Environment, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Department of the Environment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, organized the 2nd Seminar on Environment, Culture and Religion – Promoting intercultural Dialogue for Sustainable Development” in Tehran, Iran.

and religious practices are interwoven with cultural values, social principles, political engagement, and economic prosperity. Understanding the dynamics of these beliefs and practices at the local level and, more generally, the role of faith actors within local communities is crucial for intentional and systematic sustainable development. Donors have been increasing their reliance on and partnership with faith-based organizations to channel much of the development aid. However, according to a research by the World Council of Churches³, “NGOs, including faith-based organizations, are active in more countries than many governments, and they carry more credibility with taxpayers than do government aid agencies. Indeed, some individual NGOs have country programmes with larger budgets than the government ministries to which they relate.”

The 2016 UN Environment publication on Environment, Religion and Culture in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explored the role of religion and culture in the implementation of the sustainable development goals; the role of different value systems and cultural diversity as resources for conservation, climate justice action, bridging between science and other knowledge systems. Attention was given to issues of education, traditional knowledge, rights of indigenous peoples, peace building, gender, sustainability and economics, participation, and civil mobilization.

The publication describes some of the inter-linkages of religion, culture and the environment, as well as the environmental and socioeconomic dimensions of sustainable development. It uses the five critical areas in the 2030 Agenda - people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership - whose objective is to leave no one behind and to reach those furthest behind first, - in order to demonstrate the ways in which the sustainable development goals are interrelated with expressions of religion and spirituality in local communities. It concludes with a set of recommendations toward finding lasting solutions to these issues, to help free humanity from want and deprivation, while fostering human wellbeing and strengthening efforts expressing duty of care.

It is also argued that the integrated approach should facilitate the integration of religious, spiritual and cultural values to ensure inclusive green and transformative development through adopting value-faith-based lifestyles and behaviors to achieve sustainable consumption and production. Reaching to local, poorest and marginalized communities can significantly contribute to ending extreme poverty, leaving no one behind. The integrated approach coupled with cultural and religious values can promote innovative nature-based solutions, respect for traditional knowledge and cultural diversity, exercise environmental stewardship and duty of care.

It is more urgent than ever to promote creative solutions to achieving the SDGs. Coupling environmental concerns with duty of care, for example, can enhance the role of religion and culture working together to achieve sustainability. Religious practices and spiritual expressions align with many important topics of environmental ethics, including the value of the natural world; the need to stay within the planetary boundaries; the continuity between human and non-human forms of life; the moral significance of all living beings in the eyes of God and/or in the cosmic order; the ritual dependence of human life on the natural world; and the principles of justice and other moral norms that reflect our responsibility to live in balance with nature.

³ Faith-based and secular humanitarian organizations by Elizabeth Ferris

Maurice Strong, the first executive director of UN Environment said: “It is the responsibility of each human being today to choose between the force of darkness and the force of light. We must therefore transform our attitudes, and adopt a renewed respect for the superior laws of Divine Nature.”

Definition of Faith-Based Organizations

UN Environment strategy on faith-based organizations should be in line with the UN Task Force on Religion and Development definition, which in turn is informed by more than a decade of experience among different UN organizations.⁴

“Legally registered international faith-based development and humanitarian NGOs, Religious leaders, religious institutions such as Mosques, Churches and their affiliated NGOs; and independent local community entities inspired by faith principles.”⁵

The Task Force supports the work of United Nations staff, towards the shared objective of learned, strategic and sustained engagement with key partners in the faith-based world, to support respective and collective efforts to realize international development goals. The objectives of the task force are:

- Provide a resource pool on partnerships with faith-based organizations for colleagues within the United Nations as well as other developmental counterparts.
- Strengthen the integration of faith-based organizations partnerships within broader civil society outreach and provide informed policy guidance upon request.

The Task Force is mandated to provide important services to the members of the task team including: serving as a convener of multilateral experience and expertise, provide a forum to consult and engage within the UN and with non-UN international partners based on diverse UN experiences, evidence and analysis; convene policy dialogues with faith-based partners, share tools, guidelines, information and other capacity building resources; share experiences, lessons, challenges and best practices learned through diverse partnerships with faith-based organizations at country, regional and global levels; support members in developing and/or ensuring clarity and consistency in outreach to/with faith-based partners; and convene regular joint UN system-wide activities and initiatives with a view to engaging faith actors in a learned and strategic manner around shared global objectives.

Goals and Strategies

In 2008, by its resolution on the “promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace,” the UN General Assembly encouraged the promotion of dialogue among all cultures, and asked that States consider, where appropriate, initiatives that identify practical actions in all levels of society for promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, tolerance and understanding.⁶ In 2015, by the terms of the first text, titled “Promotion

⁴ Although some UN organizations have indicated their own definition of faith-based organizations, such as UNDP, these definitions however tend to agree on the basics, while including some specific details for practical purposes.

⁵ 2009 UNFPA Guidelines for engaging faith-based organizations as agents of change

⁶ GA (resolution 62/90)

of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace,” the UN General Assembly, among other measures, emphasized that mutual understanding and interreligious and intercultural dialogue constituted important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace.⁷

With this backdrop of the importance of inter-religious cooperation, a number of UN agencies have developed some approaches to involving faith-based organizations in the implementation of their programme of work and projects. UN Environment has also been involved, to a certain extent, as part of its strategy to engage all types of stakeholders; however, the organization has been keen to develop an innovative approach to engaging with faith-based organizations that would maximize the mutual benefits in the wake of the complexity of the implementation of the 2030 global development agenda. For this purpose, this strategy outlines key areas where UN Environment believes a genuine and productive partnership would make a difference and would accelerate the implementation of the SDGs in an effective manner. Development of this strategy started with a policy paper that was discussed and approved by the Senior Management Team of UN Environment. The draft strategy document was shared with and benefited from contributions of UN Environment staff, UN Task Team on Religion and Development, and individual faith leaders. A dedicated consultation meeting with faith-based organizations was held on 30 November 2017 in Nairobi at the margins of the UN Environment Assembly. The participants have endorsed the goals, suggested priority areas and contributed to the database of faith-based organizations as well as committed to conduct specific activities to assist in the implementation of the strategy.⁸

The strategy stems from the intrinsic linkages between faith concepts of stewardship and duty of care and environmental sustainability that improves the socio-economic conditions of all leaving no one behind. Linking religion and culture through environmental sustainability can significantly address climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, desertification and unsustainable land and water use, by fostering a fundamental change in attitude among people, through their own institutions and communities, and through cooperation with other cultures, including indigenous cultures whose traditional practices already embed such a relationship.

To be able to achieve the overall goals, creative partnerships must be established with faith-based organizations that are doing remarkable work through improving the lives of their local communities. This partnership can only work if it is built at all levels by engaging with religious or spiritual leaders at global as well as at local community levels. The partnership would depend on the exchange of knowledge, linking scientific findings and religious teaching for providing science faith based evidence, similar to the science policy interface work, and by mobilizing the

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