



## G20 Interfaith Forum 2021

### Policy Brief: Faith Action to Address Climate Change August 9, 2021

#### Highlights

Religious leaders and communities can and must play active roles in policy responses to global and local threats posed by climate change and in mobilizing citizen support. Compelling reasons include: (a) extensive analysis reflected for example in the 2015 Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si!*; (b) the large majorities of the world's people affiliated with religious communities;<sup>1</sup> (c) substantial tangible assets held by religious communities where direct action is feasible; and (d) numerous active interreligious and religious networks sharply focused on climate and environmental issues (examples include Faiths for Earth, the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, and the World Resources Institute's Faith and Sustainability focusing on climate change initiatives for faith-based organizations). The goal is to ensure that organizations from multiple faith communities work proactively to address global climate challenges, contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Climate Agreement, and reducing environmental degradation throughout the world.

The scale of the climate crisis requires active participation and urgent mobilization across societal sectors. Transnational, global actors like the G20 Interfaith Forum can help galvanize collaboration between faith organizations, G20 governments, companies, corporations, and civil society organizations to address the climate crisis. UNEP (UN Environment Programme) is among many institutions and analysts that highlight constructive roles that religious institutions can play in delivering on the SDGs, where sustainability is a central focus. By integrating more explicitly environmental dimensions of these agendas, religious, faith and cultural communities can promote strong, inclusive, green, sustainable, and transformative economies based on well-being, circularity, sharing and collaboration, and alternative measures of growth. The many ongoing initiatives underscore both active work and potential expansion. Integrated approaches bridging religious and secular interests in sustainability have untapped potential for impact.

Faith organizations themselves can support broad efforts and serve as exemplars. They possess, maintain and preserve substantial lands and properties. They can contribute to the collective efforts to address climate change, but also demonstrate their direct potential for impact and leadership. A prominent and practical approach involves using science-based targets for faith organizations to establish an emission baseline on buildings or land owned by faith organizations. Likewise, socio-economic activities of faith organizations and communities add considerable value: In the United States, for example, a 2016 study (conducted by Religious Freedom & Business Foundation) estimates that they annually contribute about \$1.2 trillion of socio-economic value, like the 15th-largest national economy and more than the global annual revenues of the world's top ten tech companies, including Apple, Amazon, and Google. Faith-linked companies and corporations can shift from fossil-fuel based energy consumption and transportation to green technology and make workplaces truly ecofriendly. Clarity on the emissions they generate could help lower faith organizations' environmental impact, and enhance their regeneration impact. With faith organizations' high investment power, they can seek out and invest in values-based, ecologically sensitive projects that contribute to socially and ethically responsible returns that also support the UN SDGs.

Religion has always been an important vehicle for forging what people value, embrace, and protect. Faith organization can play crucial roles in a brighter climate future.

## **Recommendations for Policy-makers:**

- Faith communities with G20 support should implement an ‘SDGs Road Map’ to clarify and define their contributions to the achievement of the Agenda 2030. A supported, ambitious, momentum building framework would ensure that faith groups – and the wider world – understand what their contribution is and help draw in the necessary partners and technical skills.
- The G20 should support faith-linked education systems, thus faith-related schools, universities and institutions, to inform new generations about climate sensitive practices and solutions.
- Multireligious initiatives on climate deserve direct, explicit G20 support
- The G20 should support faith community implementation of science-based targets to curb their emissions from their massive assets. This would offer faith groups and institutions a comprehensive, transparent framework – from commitment through action to certification – to guide their work implementing emission reduction targets.
- The G20 should support investment schemes for faith organizations to implement energy refurbishment of buildings to lower their emissions, and develop sustainable land-use plans

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<sup>1</sup> Worldwide, Pew Research Center estimates indicate that over eight out of ten people have a religious affiliation (a demographic study of more than 230 countries and territories estimates that the 5.8 billion religiously affiliated adults and children around the globe represented 84% of the 2010 world population of 6.9 billion). Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life. [www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/).