

G20 Interfaith Forum 2025
Prevention, Preparedness, and Response to Disasters: Religious Roles
July 25, 2025 (Draft)

Strengthening disaster resilience and response across the world is an [overarching priority](#) for the G20 South African 2025 presidency. With the effects of climate change a present reality, response to its impact has become a central aspect of global as well as national policy and thus a G20 priority. The challenges posed by a warming planet—hunger, displacement, disease—demand action from leaders to protect the environment and, above all, communities that are directly affected. Engaging key societal actors in disaster response is thus an imperative in addressing the consequences of a changing environment.

Faith actors are frontline responders in situations of disaster—playing vital roles in prevention, preparedness, and disaster response around the world. They thus have vital insights and capabilities that can enhance disaster anticipation and response. Religious communities’ leadership and involvement in disasters take many forms, from local community to transnational mobilization. Their work inspires both personal faith-driven initiatives and sustained, collaborative efforts across multiple faith communities. Although there is much to be gained from their proactive engagement, faith roles are little acknowledged and respected in broad analysis and institutional mechanisms. Platforms and partnerships rarely draw sufficiently on faith experience and capabilities. Bridging divides in this area demands explicit focus, analysis of experience and institutional mechanisms, and investment in partnerships.

Complex linkages complicate efforts to respond to environmental degradation and increasingly severe natural disasters. The challenges posed by climate change link tightly to various priority G20 agendas, among them energy transition, debt sustainability in low-income countries, and the equitable management of critical minerals for inclusive growth. The key challenge now is figuring out how and where faith voices can be integrated into policy processes in ways that meaningfully prioritize the most vulnerable populations. Explicit attention is thus needed both to distinct faith roles in disaster situations and to their specific contributions in cross-sector efforts.

Recommended Action

Faith-inspired organizations should be included intentionally and strategically in the full range of disaster preparedness and response efforts. Deep community roots, communication capacity, high levels of trust, and moral authority position faith groups well to promote accountability, ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable, and strengthen resilience across sectors. Expanding partnerships with religious actors can enhance information systems, mobilize resources more effectively, and ensure transparency in the use of funds.

A priority action is for G20 Engagement Groups to commit to a broad action plan for strategic reflection on multi-sector engagement on disaster response. The G20 Social Summit and Leader Summit offer the opportunity to highlight complementary roles across different sectors.

In the context of global reviews of humanitarian demands and priorities for resource mobilization and coordination, the G20 multi-sector engagement can and should direct explicit attention to religious roles in climate-change-linked disasters. That includes allotting seats at policy tables and developing mechanisms that consider issues that are especially important to faith communities. Areas of focus include the impact on religious minorities, indigenous community mechanisms for disaster response, responses to disaster-related trauma, and protecting sacred sites during disasters.

The G20 Interfaith Forum engages to develop a proposed framework for a social summit engagement on multisector disaster preparedness, leading to a G20 commitment to continuing partnerships.

Background

The UN Office of Disaster and Risk Reduction [defines disaster](#) as “A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts.” It impacts people beyond the physical burden of displacement, but harms [national economic prospects](#), individual [physical health](#), and long-term [mental wellness](#). Disasters are acutely felt by the world’s most vulnerable groups, including women, children, and those living in situations of poverty.

A key priority for strategically engaging religious communities in disaster response mechanisms is improving the documentation of their institutional involvement across various types of disasters and differing regional and community impacts. The following discussion highlights diverse platforms and experience as a foundation for analytic work by a continuing working group.

Faith actors are critical for disaster prevention, preparedness, and response. In all three areas, religious entities have broad experience and, in some cases, institutionalized mechanisms for response to a range of disasters. In all instances, religious actors work alongside other critical actors, prioritizing cooperation across sectors. Faith-linked activities range from transnational youth groups that address global and regional structural issues. [Faith & Belief Forum’s](#) 2024 Youth Interfaith Summit, for example, focused on faith, social action and climate change by hosting speakers to address “various facets of climate-related issues to empower young minds.”

Beyond broad focus, faith groups operate at the community level. To cite just one example, [Caritas International](#) in Morocco responded to a 6.8 magnitude earthquake in Morocco in 2023 by supporting the reconstruction of homes, the restoring of clean water, and the delivery of food and hygiene supplies. Faith actors play a vital role both through their catalyzing conversations at the international level and through their actions at the local level in times of disaster. Their trusted presence within communities positions them to engage at a community level in all parts of the disaster cycle: **prevention, preparedness, and response.**

Prevention

Experience and challenges for *disaster prevention* are closely tied to education and to raising public awareness, as well as advocacy, especially with national governments. Broad engagement on climate change issues involves intentional communication efforts by faith actors.

The [Anglican Church of Rwanda](#) offers an example of faith groups’ role of disaster prevention, through their work to protect the rainforests of Rwanda. The group established the Rural Development Inter-Diocesan Services ([RDIS](#)) and now leads critical projects on climate-smart agriculture, solar energy home-infrastructure, and improved cooking stoves.

Faith groups’ important action at local levels combines awareness raising and constructive action; Efforts range from large-scale environmental restoration projects, such as [EcoSikh’s](#) initiative to repopulate deforested land in India through community-led tree planting campaigns, to localized behavior change programs, like the work of [Sisters Organizing and Advancing Recycling](#) (SOAR) in Ghana, which promotes community recycling practices and environmental awareness at the grassroots level. [World Vision](#) in Tanzania, furthermore, led not only the disaster management training to various stakeholders throughout the country, but also responded to the Hanang Flood in 2024 by providing household with cooking oil and school supplies for impacted children.

Risk reduction is closely tied to livelihood stability for many of the world’s poorest populations. Faith groups’ efforts to address climate-related disasters not only provide immediate protection but also help

safeguard the long-term economic and social well-being of vulnerable communities. For example, [Lutheran World Relief](#) led projects in El Salvador to educate farmers on soil erosion, water retention and soil and water conservation.

Together, these diverse efforts underscore how many different faith-inspired organizations are not only vital first responders, but also serve as long-term partners in building resilience, advancing environmental stewardship, and reducing disaster risk through education, advocacy, and sustainable development at the community level. However, dialogue and cooperation need to be reinforced, as more encouragement of exchanges and active lesson learning among countries and communities would be beneficial. ACT Alliance, a global faith-based coalition operating in more than 120 countries and including faith-linked organizations such as Islamic Relief Worldwide, Baha'i International Community, and World Vision International, issued a [statement](#) in 2019 calling for all governments and stakeholders to collaborate, leverage their networks, and provide platforms for meaningful dialogue on disaster risk reduction.

Preparedness

The most concrete action calls involve the need for *better preparedness*. At various levels, whether for communities, cities, national governments or global bodies, there are significant gaps in preparedness mechanisms and the faith community's involvement. While there are some exceptions, religious institutions are largely absent from key planning processes and decision-making mechanisms for disaster preparedness.

Training and capacity building and resource mobilization are priority tasks, to which several institutions are committed, with promising programs. The United States' Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) illustrates the intentional inclusion of faith actors in government response work. The agency [trains](#) response managers, faith actors, and emergency responders to strategically mobilize "in a reciprocal approach to disaster planning that is integrated into current local and statewide emergency management effort." Episcopal Relief & Development similarly offers resources (through their [Pastors and Disasters](#) program) to help Episcopalian and Anglican faith leaders [prepare](#) for disasters by outlining tools such as early warning systems, identifying evacuation centers, and establishing communication channels in advance. More than 90,000 individuals across 9 countries used the toolkit in [2023](#), contributing to a global effort to assist those affected by disasters. These widespread engagements highlight the importance of systematically including religious voices and experiences in disaster preparedness and response efforts.

A key priority, therefore, is to identify meaningful ways to systematically incorporate religious voices and experiences. This requires a deeper understanding of their activities, the values that drive them, and how they intersect with broader cross-sectoral efforts. For faith communities themselves, this moment calls for a spirit of mutual respect and a shared commitment to compassionate action.

Response

In many kinds of disaster, the remarkable mobilization of faith communities, motivated by humanitarian impulses and faith teachings, is a feature of *response to disasters*. These patterns of response are also linked to the remarkable resilience that is often observed in disaster situations. Some action is linked to institutional mechanisms that are designed to adapt swiftly, others to more spontaneous mobilization. This is witnessed during recent disasters, such as the [Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's](#) response to the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, the 2023 Maui fires, and the 2025 Los Angeles fires. [Episcopal Relief & Development](#) has similarly responded to crises by partnering with local faith-based organizations. In South Africa, they worked alongside [Hope Africa](#)—the social development program of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa—in response to severe flooding. Following Hurricane Oscar in Cuba, they also partnered with the Episcopal Church of Cuba to address widespread [power outages](#).

Islamic Relief Worldwide has similarly engaged faith-based approaches in disaster response, notably during the 2010 Pakistan floods and [subsequent efforts](#), as well as in Sri Lanka's [flood recovery](#). Their response included the delivery of clean water, food, and shelter, while framing the disaster through a faith lens—as a test of collective responsibility. Islamic Relief also integrated Islamic practices such as zakat (almsgiving) and sadaqah (charity) into their response mechanisms, ensuring relevant and community-driven support.

[Catholic Relief Services](#) (CRS) similarly works in close partnership with faith groups across Mozambique to deliver both emergency relief and long-term development. In response to recurring climate-related disasters such as Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, CRS has supported conflict-affected families with food, shelter, and hygiene assistance, while also investing in sustainable recovery. A notable initiative includes a pilot conservation agriculture program in drought-affected southern Mozambique, where CRS is promoting green-manure cover crops to improve soil health and increase crop yields.

The strength of faith groups lies in their broad reach and adaptability, which enables international financing mechanisms to channel resources directly to trusted, community-based organizations. Their work in disaster settings often transcends siloed approaches—spanning prevention, preparedness, and response efforts simultaneously. They are critical actors in disasters in their ability to consistently mobilize at the community level.