

United Nations Environment Programme

India Country Office

India's Faith for Earth Strategy and Action Plan



FAITH FOR EARTH



**ONE EARTH
MANY RELIGIONS
ONE GOAL**

Introduction

For more than 80% of the people living on earth, spiritual values have been the main driving force behind individual behaviours. Citizens perceive faith-based organizations to be trustworthy, credible, and networked with dynamism that enables them to operate and respond to the needs and values of the communities on ground. Spiritual beliefs and religious practices are also interwoven with cultural values, social principles, political engagement, and economic prosperity.

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 helping to work towards sustainable development. Research reveals that over 190 faith-based organizations have been actively involved with working at the global, regional, and local levels in addressing climate change, energy conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity, and reforestation, among others. Coupling environmental concerns with duty of care, can help enhance the role of religion and culture working together to achieve sustainability.

This is why, an UN Inter-agency Task Force (including the UNEP) on Religion and Development (UN IATF-FBOs -2010) was set up and tasked with facilitating knowledge exchange, providing a resource pool of experiences, and strengthening partnerships with faith-based organizations. Since then, UNEP has convened and conducted several important initiatives and conventions in partnership with faith-based organizations.

During the year 2017, UN Environment launched the Faith for Earth Initiative. The goal of Faith for Earth initiative is to strategically engage with faith-based organizations and partner with them to collectively achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfil the objectives of 2030 Agenda. A global strategy was thus framed to achieve the goals set for the Faith for Earth Initiative.

In addition, the innovative global strategy advocates an integrated approach encompassing the religious and cultural values to ensure inclusive green and transformative development through adopting lifestyles that are informed by faith-based values and behaviours to achieve sustainable consumption and production.

The global strategy for Faith for Earth Initiative, is based on three overarching goals: 1) Leadership for policy impact; 2) Financing to support SDGs; and 3) Knowledge-based decision support system. The following document is an effort at aligning with the Faith for Earth Initiative and contextualise its stated global goals with India specific actions, plans and targets.

The Indian context

India is a multicultural and multifaith country. Religion and culture form the main source of much of the moral laws and ethos in India. They color the world view held by most Indians. Aside from ritualistic mandates of disparate religion and indigenous cultural traditions in India, the common

denominator for most of them is the “interconnectedness of religious and environmental concern” (Assisi Declaration et al.).

India’s spiritual heritage places premium on the need to preserve and protect nature and sustainable consumption. Should the established religions and indigenous culture in India be mobilized for the cause of environment, it would be easier for the environment protection movement to achieve its goal of a green and a sustainable future. The Faith for Earth Initiative gives a great platform for UNEP- ICO to work with India specific FBO’s.

Enough documentation in varied religious texts and anecdotes of traditional folklore exists, all of which encourage and promote sustained conservationist ethics among India’s population. But these have so far been dispersed and lost in the larger discourse and discussions on religious texts, and in rituals and beliefs.

UNEP ICO can bridge the gap by bringing the different faith leaders together by show casing the commonality of environmental concerns and helping to structure the existing documentations from different faiths and indigenous culture on environment with science-based evidence.

Background of FBO work in India

The 3-year-old UNEP ICO has been engaging FBO’s such as Art of Living foundation, Isha Foundation, the Church of South India (CSO) and ISKON through several outreach activities especially centred around the World Environment Day celebrations. These FBO’s by themselves also have been doing some significant work with the public and the society for environmental protection.

Isha Foundation partnered with UNEP in a significant manner, during the WED 2018 activities when, India was the global lead for the main event. Isha foundation reached out to over 400 locations worldwide within its networks with its Rally for river volunteers and conducted several clean up drives. One of the main highlights of the WED 2018 was a dialogue between UNEP’s Executive Director, Sadguru Jagadish Vasudev (FBO leader) and Dia Mirza, UNEP’s Good will Ambassador at prominent location in Delhi.

UNEP has also been engaged with ‘**Art of Living**’, an organisation with its roots in spirituality, and which has nurtured a deep respect for our planet in thousands of people around the world through various activities and mission. During the 2018 WED, at a symposium organised by UN to commemorate the day, people from 80 different countries joined Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder of Art of Living by taking a pledge to reduce plastic pollution. AOL has also been doing active work in promoting Zero Budget organic farming. It has trained more than two million farmers and unemployed youth in this sustainable and profitable method of farming. Sri Sri Institute of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Trust (SSIAST) a subsidiary of Art of Living foundation has brought about a commendable change in the lives of these farmers.

UNEP ICO has also been closely associated with CSI Synod Department of Ecological Concerns a subsidiary of Church of South India. The CSI has been educating the values of sustainability to youth through 94 Aided degree colleges, 341 High and Higher Schools, 1704 Primary Schools, 47 Technical Institutions 24 Para Medical Institutions, 14 Professional Institutions, 50 Medical Centres and 343 Hostels established by them.

UNEP has been supporting their educational efforts by sharing their successes, guiding, and mentoring their environmental programmes with other stakeholders. UNEP also works closely with CSI Youth, educators and schools in the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge programme aimed at youth by engaging them across the country to address the issue of plastic pollution threatening life in oceans, rivers and on land.

UNEP India has been engaged with ISKON, another major Faith Based organisation of national as well as international repute during the WED 2019. ISKON helped plant 4800 trees across 42 Cities and small towns in India. They conducted clean up campaigns along the river Yamuna and River Sabarmati under the Swachh Bharat Campaign.

UNEP has also been encouraging and supporting **URI (United Religion Initiative)** India chapter, on various big and small initiatives on calling for sound environmental action.

FBO engagement strategy in India

A strong Eco Spiritual and cultural tradition in India calls for a systematic framework of action for UNEP India with all Faith Based Organisations.

In alignment with the Global Strategy outlined by UNEP with FBO's, the following provides a framework for India action.

Mission

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

Vision

“A world where everything is in balance”

In consonance with the FBO Global 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.

FBO Engagement – UNEP India Strategy

Goals	Strategic actions to achieve goals	Responsibility Lead	Method	Deliverable and reporting
1. Strengthen FBO Partnerships	1.1 Inventory of FBO's in India	UNEP intern	Internet search	List of FBO's in India
	1.2 Identify and map FBO and spiritual organization engaged with environmental activities	UNEP Intern	Internet search	List of FBO'S with environmental action track record
	1.3 Seek and initiate partnerships with major ones	FBO coordinator and Partnership consultant	Start with one organisation with prior connect for year 1 such as ISKON	As per yearly plan
	1.4 Be receptive to other committed partners	FBO coordinator as and when queries come up	Decision taken by FBO coordinator with ICO Head	Advise and guide
	1.5 Initiate an FBO Green network within India	TBD after year 1	TBD	TBD – After review of yearly implementation
	1.6 Foster cross cultural understanding -stimulate youth engagement with interfaith and intercultural harmony	Partnership in charge and FBO coordinator	During first year, ensure there is a Youth connect with plan of action drawn with ISKON / or others should the need arise	Ensure inclusion of youth in planned actions with Faith partners

	1.7 Plan and develop capacity building activities	Activities developed as and when needed and in alignment with UNEP programmatic areas in India. For example, in Japan Project - Haridwar and Varanasi faith connect was included in the Outreach planned on Plastics	As per need	To be included in plans with identified partners
2. Mobilize faith-based investments	2.1 Identify main faith-based financing institutions for partnership building	Partnerships in charge and FBO coordinator	Internet search in help with Intern	Prepare a list of faith-based organisation involved with philanthropic activities in education and social sectors
	2.2 Map and support environment friendly practices by FBO's	Guidance provided by UNEP expert as per the environmental theme	Initiate collection and storing of such practices in a folder as and when it comes to notice	Guidance and support to FBO's pursuing environment friendly practices
	2.3 Support and provide technical assistance to FBO's to set example by greening their activities/ buildings/ land holdings or locations	UNEP to provide assessment, identification guidance and if possible expert support on focused areas for change	Arrive at an understanding through discussion and meeting between relevant UNEP personnel with relevant FBO	Work with major FBO partners such as ISKON with established faith-based cities/locations
	2.4 Organize bilateral visits and study tours between FBOs and other UN Environment initiatives	As and when needed by identified UNEP personnel	As per need	TBD – example ISKON- study tours to Green Pilgrimage / religious centres

3. Support Faith – Science evidence for knowledge-based decision support systems	3.1 Identify Faith based advocacy leaders to mobilize at all levels as ambassadors of Faith environment	FBO coordinator	Prepare list through research	Maintain a database of ambassadors and contracts of Faith based ambassadors and contacts
	3.2 Calendar of faith celebration and environmental events – exchange knowledge and run awareness and advocacy events	FBO coordinator	Identify important festival or dates. Prepare environmental messages and share it with the list of FBO prepared	Develop communication with FBO's during Ganesh Chaturthi/ Durga puja etc.
	3.4 Green pilgrimage and promote green faith tourism	Identified UNEP experts	Work with Aarushi Nishank – Tourism Department to come up with a plan for Green Faith Tourism	Work with concerned parties on Char Dham yatra/ Kumbh Mela and so on
	3.5 Develop knowledge products – linking religious teachings to scientific evidence related to environment	FBO coordinators/ Faith experts and UNEP experts	Work with URI – to develop user friendly material for students and educators	Develop and share resource material connecting faith with environment for different target audiences