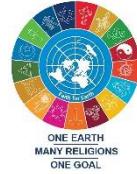




FAITH FOR EARTH



United Nations Environment Programme

Faith for Earth Initiative

**A Strategy for Engagement
The Role of Faith Leaders and Faith-Based Organisations
in the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)**



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Introduction

It is well recognized that to achieve the global Agenda 2030 it is essential to engage and partner with all stakeholders and adopt untapped innovative approaches. The role of civil society and non-government organizations has been crucial over the last couple of decades in mobilizing action by the public as well as in forming policies that serve societies. Over the past few years, the involvement of the full spectrum of such organizations has started to improve by the increased participation of those organizations based on faith, values, culture and indigenous knowledge. Many environmental faith-based organizations have been actively involved at a global, regional and local levels in protecting, conserving, and restoring land resources. With control over 8% of habitable land, and 5% of commercial forests,¹ the potential of Faith-Based Organizations for aggregate global and regional impact is immense.

UNEP's Faith for Earth Initiative seeks to harness a largely untapped potential of Faith Leaders and their communities, and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), who represent approximately 80% of the people living on earth,² in addressing climate change and promoting environmental stewardship. This includes leadership of the [Interfaith Rainforest Initiative](#), a program of Faith for Earth, and an international alliance working globally and in five countries that together contain 70% of the world's remaining tropical forests (Brazil, Colombia, DRC, Indonesia and Peru) to bring the mobilizing power and political influence of religious leaders to bear on efforts to protect and restore tropical forests.

By propagating the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (UN Decade) to faith communities, that share a common objective to strengthen environmental ethics within their own faith communities, the ambitious goal stated in the UN Decade in promoting ecosystem restoration at an immense scale of dozens of millions of hectares becomes more attainable- particularly looking at FBO landholdings. Faith communities can also intervene politically in powerful ways to induce governments at all levels to prioritize and invest in ecosystem restoration. Implementing spiritual teachings from scripture, prominent religious figures, and other sources of spiritual and religious practices by faith communities will also have an enormous impact on forests, agricultural lands, species, and other ecosystems.

The UN Decade highlights three main goals that seek to inspire a new ecological, economic and social trajectory:

- Enhance global, regional, national and local commitments and actions to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems;
- Increase our understanding of the multiple benefits of successful ecosystem restoration; and
- Apply this knowledge in our education systems and within all public and private sector decision-making.

In achieving the above, the Decade seeks to support Life Below Water (SDG 14) and Life on Land (SDG 15) by enhancing the quality and area of habitats for wildlife. These habitat improvements will in turn help societies mitigate and adapt to climate change (SDG 13), improve the health of societies in rural and urban environments (SDGs 3, 11), and increase the supplies of clean water (SDG 6) and sustainable food (SDG 2, 12). Investments in restoration that adhere to principles of gender equality and restorative justice will also provide and improve work opportunities and income streams (SDGs 1, 5, 8, 10, 16); and cross-sectoral collaboration, learning and innovation on the use of ecosystem goods and services (SDGs 4,

¹ http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/ZUG_Guidelines_to_FCI_2017.pdf

² Pew Research Center (2012), *The Global Religious Landscape - A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010*. Washington: Pew Research Center.

7, 9, 17). All of these effects will assist countries in resolving conflicts over natural resources and reduce the need for communities to migrate as a result of such conflicts. Lastly, and strongly aligned with 2030 Agenda, realizing the human rights of all people, including for example the local communities and indigenous peoples living in many of the ecosystems requiring conservation and restoration, will be central to all activities of the UN Decade. The Emissions Gap Report 2020 places significant importance in reforestation efforts as a major long-term sectoral transformation activity to reach net-zero Green House Gas Emissions (GHG) globally by implementing policies to conserve and restore land carbon stocks and protect natural ecosystems.

Spiritual beliefs, indigenous traditions and religions are main drivers for cultural values, social inclusion, political engagement, and economic prosperity. By utilizing the dynamics of these beliefs at the local level and including the role of faith actors is crucial for sustainable development. Faith communities have a longstanding reputation in society providing socio-economic services to local communities in the areas of welfare, education, health, and disaster relief particularly for the poor and marginalised. Values and faith-based lifestyles and behaviours have demonstrated that sustainable local impact at all levels of society can be achieved. In some countries, strong synergy is demonstrated between political and religious leadership.

In its recent Special Report on Climate Change and Land, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognizes the importance of securing community land for climate change, and recent research shows that indigenous and community lands are a globally important carbon sink, holding at least 22% of the carbon stored in tropical and subtropical forests and at least 17% of the total carbon (including soil carbon) stored in forests. There is considerable potential for more carbon to be stored through ecosystem restoration on degraded indigenous and community lands if they were secured, better protected and restored. A primary focus of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in each pilot country is on building powerful partnerships between indigenous leaders and religious leaders to protect these land rights and therefore to contribute significantly to the goals of the UN Decade.

The avenues for faith actors to contribute to the attainment of the UN Decade focuses on ten key areas. Motivated by spiritual values and driven by an ethical responsibility to mitigate human impact on the environment, several barriers stated in the UN Decade can be overcome by the social and political influences of faith communities around the world. Forests can deliver 30% of the climate solution needed by 2030 but receive less than 3% of all climate funding³, making the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative a particularly great example for restoration efforts. Adopting an integrated approach of religious and cultural values in the implementation of the UN Decade to ensure inclusive green and transformative development is critical for greater environmental stewardship, attainment of the SDGs, and 2030 Agenda.

Key Areas for FBOs Engagement by the Faith for Earth Initiative and Partners

Barriers Identified in the Implementation of the UN Decade

The overarching vision for the UN Decade is the health and wellbeing of all life on Earth and that of future generations, where the upcoming decade is characterised by an increase in the areas of healthy ecosystems, reduction of ecosystem loss, and an end to fragmentation and

³ <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/financing-sustainable-land-use-people-and-planet>; https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/press_releases/?329190/Forests-food-and-land-can-deliver-30-of-solutions-needed-to-tackle-climate-crisis-by-2030

degradation of healthy ecosystems. Similarly, Faith for Earth strives to promote a balance in all spheres of life by encouraging, empowering and engaging with Faith-Based Organizations as partners, at all levels, toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling Agenda 2030 based on the common understanding of world's religions of the duty of care of nature.

The UN Decade identifies six primary barriers to catalysing a global movement that promotes and implements large-scale restoration, namely;

1. Limited awareness across societies, globally, of the considerable negative effects that ecosystem degradation is having on the well-being and livelihoods of billions of people, the costs of this degradation, and the profound societal benefits that would accrue with major investments in ecosystem restoration;
2. Despite the economic benefits that restoration investments would bring societies, the pressure on decision-makers in public and private sector to invest in long-term ecosystem restoration initiatives is relatively small compared with the pressures to invest in other sectors like health care, manufacturing, education and defense;
3. Relative scarcity of legislations, policies, regulations, tax incentives and subsidies that incentivize a shift in investments towards large scale restoration and production systems, value chains and infrastructure that do not degrade ecosystems;
4. Limited technical knowledge and capacity of national governments, local governments, local NGOs and private companies to design and implement large-scale restoration initiatives;
5. Relatively small amount of finance that societies are making available for investing in large scale restoration because of the perceived and/or real risks involved in such investments; and
6. Limited investment into long-term research, including social as well as natural sciences, that focusses on innovation to improve restoration protocols through time.

Annex 1 of the UN Decade Strategy expands on the secondary barriers which include local ecological, economic and social factors within specific landscapes to global geopolitical factors and economic forces influencing governments and inter-governmental organisations. These barriers were identified through a collaborative effort of all the stakeholders.

Pathways Identified in the UN Decade to Address the Six Primary Barriers and the Role of Faith Communities

Three main pathways seek to address the six primary barriers:

Pathway I seek to generate the peer-driven, participatory global movement that focus on upscaling restoration. Faith organisations present a foundation upon which local, regional and global networks and initiatives are linked - a common spiritual and cultural perspective towards life, generally. By uplifting the role of environmental ethics within pre-existing religious frameworks, a new approach - or motivation - towards ecosystem restoration may be achieved, thereby, increasing the intent of societies worldwide to identify and restore degraded landscapes.

For example, Laudato Si' (Praise be to you)⁴ "on care for our common home" gave life to The Living Chapel,⁵ a call to inspire the public irrespective of religious denomination to reconnect with nature by providing intercultural and interfaith collaboration to restore "our common home"

⁴ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

⁵ <https://livingchapel.com/>

through the creation of Laudato Si' Gardens and Living Sacred Spaces. The Gardens seek to equip the public with the ability to participate in the conservation of rare and endangered fruit and plant species and restoration of the earth using scientifically-sound premises.

Faith for Earth endeavours to build upon, and amplify the implementation of the Guidelines on Green Houses of Worship⁶ in partnership with organisations like The Living Chapel tackling a fraction of the estimated 30% of all related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions emitted as a result of faith institutions.⁷ Through this example, the economic and cultural value of biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration rests with the house of worship and faith leaders showing their respective communities the value of green spaces particularly in urban settings, demonstrating the effect of mini-forests on societal well-being, inspiring a spiritually-led intervention for halting, preventing and reversing degradation. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church⁸ endeavors to create a natural symbol of heaven on Earth providing every creature a habitat, widely characterized by their lush forests that surround the Church in 35,000 locations. Efforts as such, driven by approximately 36 million of the Ethiopian Orthodox community living in Ethiopia,⁹ has the potential to mainstream reforestation efforts into the national budget and form part of a resilient climate change strategy, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC),¹⁰ on a massive scale.

At the same time, the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is managing country programs in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru to bring moral urgency and faith-based leadership to the protection and restoration of tropical forests. The initiative can serve as a powerful platform for mobilizing commitment and advocacy around forests and ecosystem restoration.

By strengthening an interfaith network, peer-to-peer learning on best practices for different ecosystems will strengthen the research, policy and practice of ecosystem restoration by faith communities worldwide.

Pathway II seeks to foster political will from heads of state, government ministers, directors of government departments, parliamentarians, business leaders and landowners to support the global movement and champion restoration in their respective countries. In this way, and building on the momentum of the global movement developed in Pathway I, political will for ecosystem restoration will be fostered.

Such collaboration is essential to implement multi-jurisdictional initiatives like the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI), an African-led initiative spanning 20 countries across Africa aiming to restore degraded landscape in the Sahel. The Wall seeks to cover 8,000 km of land, characterized as the largest living structure on the planet.¹¹

One of the primary objectives of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is to mobilize religious leaders and faith communities to advocate for governments at local, sub-national and national levels to adopt, fulfill or expand upon their commitments to protect and restore tropical forests. The initiative provides a unique avenue for mobilizing new political will around the restoration agenda.

⁶ <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/publication/guidelines-green-houses-worship>

⁷ <https://livingchapel.com/design/green-walls/>

⁸ <https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-019-00275-x/index.html>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_Orthodox_Tewahedo_Church

¹⁰ <https://ndcpartnership.org/countries-map/country?iso=ETH>; <https://www.ndcs.undp.org/content/ndc-support-programme/en/home/our-work/geographic/africa/Ethiopia.html>

¹¹ <https://www.unccd.int/actions/great-green-wall-initiative>

Pathway III seeks to catalyse research and development that generates the technical capacity that is needed to restore ecosystems at scale, focusing on the best available methods for designing, implementing, monitoring and sustaining ecosystem restoration to institutions involved in ecosystem restoration. The potential that faith leaders and faith institutions can bring to the global reforestation and conservation effort is tremendous. The role of science, indigenous knowledge and traditional practices are critical for building resilient ecosystems. It is vital to identify and build on pre-existing global campaigns like: Global Campaign for Nature,¹² to gather bold ideas for decisive action, particularly of Indigenous and Local Communities, to conserve 30% of the planet in a natural state by 2030; the Bonn Challenge¹³; and others. The Faith for Earth Coalition will be another such institution seeking to engage four Coalition Councils for greater multi-stakeholder and intergenerational partnerships at local, regional and global levels: the Council of Eminent Leaders; the Youth Council; the Network of Chief Executive Officers; and the Faith-Science Consortium.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is another example committed to bringing the latest science, research and data on rainforests, climate and the rights of indigenous peoples to religious leaders and networks in a format they can digest and apply in their respective spheres of teaching, outreach and influence. Already the initiative has published [a library of fact sheets, issue primers, faith toolkits and resources guides](#) for religious leaders and faith communities on the protection and restoration of forests. The initiative can continue to serve as a platform of education and awareness raising for restoration, globally and in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru.

Ten Actions for Ecosystem Restoration Envisioned by the UN Decade

In order to build a generation of restoration, the UN Decade encompasses a wide continuum of activities that contribute to protecting intact ecosystems and repairing degraded ecosystems. The UN Decade calls upon partners to work on ten actions aimed at preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide.

i. To empower a global movement

The UN Decade seeks to develop a global movement of organizations and individuals that collaborate to catalyze ecosystem restoration by self-organizing and self-orchestrating activities. From a faith perspective, for example, Sikh groups around the world have united towards the Million Tree Project¹⁴ to plant 1 million trees in 1,820 locations including Australia, Kenya, US, UK and India. The project honours the 550th birthday of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, and inculcate the prayer that “Air is the teacher, water is the father, earth is the mother” in everyday life, particularly in the younger generations.¹⁵

In the inverse, the UN Decade may be an opportunity to revive dormant or forgotten reforestation initiatives around the world. In Poland, the Bialowieza Forest, a natural forest of the European Plain¹⁶ and UNESCO World Heritage Site, is at risk of increased timber harvesting and bark beetle outbreaks. In April 2018, the Court of Justice of the European

¹² <https://www.campaignfornature.org/>

¹³ <https://www.bonnchallenge.org/about>

¹⁴ <https://www.livinglandsandwaters.org/what-we-do/our-projects/milliontrees-project.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/05/sikhs-sikhism-guru-nanak-550-anniversary-tree-planting>

¹⁶ <http://www.ilovebialowieza.com/>

Union (CJEU) found that the order that intensified logging in the Forest was against European Law.¹⁷ Organisations including UNESCO, WWF, ClientEarth¹⁸ raised awareness about illegal logging in the Forest and are strategically placed to harness the momentum of the UN Decade. Faith communities are already connected through their shared spiritual and cultural beliefs. Harnessing this connection for a large-scale restoration effort, drawing from the pre-existing importance placed on the environment, is crucial in achieving the type of global impact that the UN Decade envisions, and attainable with the support from faith leaders and FBOs. For example, 87% of Poland's population identify themselves as Roman Catholic;¹⁹ in identifying a potential to galvanise the efforts of the Catholic Church in collaboration with environmental groups, and certainly any other interested religious group, a unique avenue to influence political will in favour of protection of the Forest presents a renewed sense of hope. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is mobilizing a global movement of religious leaders with a focus on forests which can be leveraged for the restoration agenda and the UN Decade.

ii. Finance restoration on the ground; and iii. Setting the incentives

The UN Decade highlights the cost associated with restoration, particularly the size of initial investment to achieve the envisioned results, calling on international lenders, development agencies and private businesses to support this global initiative. Further, investing in sustainable investments with long-term ecological benefits over practices that are less sustainable but with greater financial gain are key to a healthier ecosystem.

FBOs own trillions of dollars that can be used to finance restoration efforts around the globe. They own 8% of habitable land and 5% of commercial forests. The significant land holdings can be used to drive reforestation projects to curate carbon sinks in urban as well as rural settings. Divesture from fossil fuels, impact investing, and forest restoration, are some areas that are gaining traction by FBOs worldwide. The United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI) is one such institution that seeks to engage the global financial sector to mobilise private sector finance for sustainable finance and development.²⁰

FaithInvest,²¹ for example, is a not-for profit membership organization for religious groups and faith-based institutional investors aimed at growing the scale and impact of faith-consistent, values-driven investing worldwide. The Economy of Francesco is a call by young people to imbue the economic system with justice, inclusivity, sustainability, and advocate for stewardship of common goals at the centre of government and learning institutions agendas, being part of the movement to shape a more sustainable future.²²

iv. Celebrate leadership

Political and religious leaders have recognised and contributed to an environmental ethic, building on the momentum of restorative movements. Religious eco-warriors include Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, The Aga Khan, and many others. Faith for

¹⁷ https://www.wwf.eu/what_we_do/forests/saving_bialowieza_forest/ ; <https://save-bialowieza.net/court-of-justice-of-the-european-union-logging-in-the-bialowieza-forest-is-illegal-final-verdict/>

¹⁸ <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/saving-bialowieza/>

¹⁹ [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-56_en#:~:text=There%20is%20no%20official%20religion,of%20baptised%20people%20in%202013\);](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-56_en#:~:text=There%20is%20no%20official%20religion,of%20baptised%20people%20in%202013);)

<https://www.indexmundi.com/poland/religions.html>

²⁰ <https://www.unepfi.org/about/>

²¹ <https://www.faithinvest.org/>

²² <https://francescoeconomy.org/>; <https://francescoeconomy.org/final-statement-and-common-commitment/>

Earth's facilitated declaration "Our Sacred Commitment"²³ seeks to convene high-level political and inter-faith support to create a deep sense of consciousness for the planet driven by science to maximise the implementation of activities across ecosystems. The Commitment introduces the Faith for Earth Coalition²⁴ to drive sustainable and regenerative development to achieve the SDGs and protect and restore nature by influencing policy choices at the local, national, regional, and international levels.

In August 2019 at the Religions for Peace Global Assembly, more than 900 of the world's most senior religious leaders from 125 countries representing a constituency of over 1 billion people endorsed the Faiths for Forests declaration and agreed to work with and through the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative to protect and restore tropical forests.

Pakistan's Billion Tree Tsunami²⁵ sought to reforest 350,000 hectares of trees to restore the province's depleted forests as a result of felling and natural disasters. In August 2017, Pakistan was ahead of their target, surpassing their commitment to reforest 348,400 hectares as part of the Bonn Challenge. In 2018, Plant for Pakistan²⁶ looked to establish and grow a network of private tree nurseries to create green jobs for the youth and women, embark on a five-year project until 2023 to plant a further 10 billion trees, and launch the Green Pakistan Programme that seeks to plan 100 million trees in Punjab Province.²⁷

v. Shift behaviours

The UN Decade highlights the need to break current unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Religions already determine what the community can eat, how they must dress, and other major factors contributing to their behaviour. Providing renewed direction towards ecological concerns is no more a daunting task than any of the aforementioned measures.

Laudato Si' ('Praise be to you'): Care for Our Common Home²⁸ is the second encyclical of Pope Francis that calls for the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental justice putting the planet and the poor at the fore. The encyclical letter calls for an integrated approach to combat poverty, restore dignity to the marginalised, and to protect nature.

Similarly, The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change was adopted at the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium.²⁹ The Declaration seeks to mobilise the world's 1.8 billion Muslims to play an active role in combatting climate change, and has created a foundation for the implementation of an Islamic covenant for the environment called Mizan (meaning balance), led by the Faith for Earth Initiative.

Faith actors can identify sustainable alternative sources of energy for implementation in houses of worship, implementing better consumption practices during festivals and religious celebrations- driving the change.³⁰ In 2017, Shiloh Temple in Minneapolis in the United States

²³ <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/faith-nature-our-sacred-commitment>

²⁴ <https://faithfornature.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Brochure-Faith-for-Earth-24-August-2020.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/07/pakistan-s-billion-tree-tsunami-is-astonishing/>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plant_for_Pakistan

²⁷ <https://fwf.punjab.gov.pk/gpp> ; <https://www.thegef.org/news/10-billion-trees-reversing-deforestation-tackling-climate-change-and-managing-forests>

²⁸ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

²⁹ <https://unfccc.int/news/islamic-declaration-on-climate-change>

³⁰ <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/four-ways-make-your-house-worship-eco-friendly>, <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/guidelines-green-houses-worship>

of America installed a community solar garden on its rooftop. The 630-panel array provides energy to the temple, a neighbouring mosque and 29 residences. Community solar is starting to become popular with faith-based organizations as a way of bringing renewable energy to low-income communities. In this case, the report says, it's also helping to build interfaith solidarity and understanding.³¹ The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) have introduced hydro and solar power solutions in remote communities in Afghanistan driven by local communities under Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme.³² Faith for Earth's Guidelines on Green Houses of Worship³³ present other means of achieving a green standard for faith owned buildings.

vi. Invest in research

Science-based knowledge on restoration is essential. Practices employed in one ecosystem can have adverse or no effects in another. The UN Decade calls for the development of the knowledge base of restorative practices, looking favourably towards indigenous knowledge systems for sustainable impact.³⁴

The Faith for Earth Coalition seeks to adopt an integrated approach for the partnership with faith-based organisations, youth environment leaders, a consortium of scientists and religious scholars, and a network of CEOs and private institutions that work closely with faith actors. Further, the Coalition seeks to create a network of high-level faith-inspired professionals to drive meaningful actions that are efficient and sustainable.

vii. Build up capacity

Thousands of conservation and restoration initiatives are already underway. The UN Decade will be fueled by their vision, expertise and dedication, and focus on the best available methods for designing, implementing, monitoring and sustaining ecosystem restoration initiatives. The aim will be, using appropriate institutional mechanisms, to increase the upscaling of ecosystem restoration globally by strengthening the role of science, indigenous knowledge and traditional practices and applying best technical knowledge and practice. Faith actors already serve on the frontline in all spheres of the community- most notably in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁵ By further engaging with active faith actors on environmental issues, restoration protocols in different ecosystems may be amalgamated as well as with practical lessons from stakeholders on-the-ground.

Faith for Earth has begun national coordination programmes in India, Lebanon, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in collaboration with local and global faith-based institutions to implement the Faith for Earth Strategy³⁶ seeking to empower faith actors for a sustainable impact by working with strategically placed local groups to maximize engagement and impact. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative has active country programs in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru that are guided by the most prominent religious leaders and faith-based organizations in those countries. This on-the-ground capacity can be leveraged to the benefit of the restoration agenda and the UN Decade.

³¹<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/faith-based-organizations-can-help-drive-sustainable-development-says-new>

³²<https://www.akdn.org/project/clean-and-green>

³³<https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/publication/guidelines-green-houses-worship>

³⁴<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/indigenous-peoples-and-nature-they-protect>

³⁵<https://www.unenvironment.org/faith-frontline-covid19>

³⁶<https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/faith-earth-initiative/strategy>

viii. Celebrate a culture of restoration

The UN Decade calls upon all professions in society, including artists, storytellers, producers, musicians, restaurateurs and connectors to lead the effort for ecosystem restoration. This action calls out to other influencers of culture to gain traction in promoting a culture of stewardship for nature and ecosystem restoration globally.

Ecological Art is one such avenue to manifest artistic expression for a functional purpose,³⁷ like Liberate Tate.³⁸ Most notably, Hinduism has approximately 1.2 billion adherents worldwide,³⁹ a religion that embodies the sanctity of life.⁴⁰ Drawing from the Atharva Veda⁴¹ and other principles in Hinduism, projects such as the Bhumi Project, a global platform that encourages Hindus to care for the environment, pioneered the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change, interfaith events in India, and train young Hindus to be the next generation of climate leaders.⁴²

ix. Build up the next generation

The UN Decade recognises the instrumental role of the youth in catalysing and maintaining a global movement given their strong local role and social media presence. Youth, therefore, are critically important not only for the sustainability of restoration initiatives designed to last beyond the 21st century, but also for promoting intergenerational equity. The UN Decade digital hub seeks to share learning materials on ecosystem restoration for learners of all age groups and education levels, provide perspectives and experiences of youth restoration, and galvanise youth champions in fund raising and to take up leadership positions in the various activities.

The Youth Council is an integral component of the Faith for Earth Coalition, comprised of young faith leaders advocating for harmony with the planet. Youth organisations like Green Hope Foundation have a presence in over 25 countries, leading robust environmental actions like Green the Earth, Green Energy for All, the Environment Academy, as well as Eco Star, a not-for-profit group looking to improve waste management in Kuwait by sorting recyclable trash before it reaches the landfill, providing shrubs in exchange for trash, increasing tree planting efforts at the same time.⁴³

Laying the foundation for trans-generational solidarity assumes the UN Decade's vision of strengthening the mindset of a new wave of ecosystem restoration embraced by communities at all levels.

x. Listen and learn

The tenth action of the UN Decade is to learn from the experiences from local communities and successful efforts towards ecosystem restoration. This goes hand-in-hand with peer-learning and peer-driven initiatives at all levels.

³⁷ <https://www.hisour.com/ecological-art-21062/>

³⁸ <https://www.liberatetate.org.uk/>

³⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_by_country#:~:text=Hinduism%20has%20approximately%201.2%20billion%20majority%20of%20their%20respective%20populations.

⁴⁰ <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/62416146.pdf>;

⁴¹ <https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2019/can-religion-teach-us-to-protect-our-environment-analyzing-the-case-of-hinduism/>

⁴² <https://ochs.org.uk/bhumi-project>

⁴³ <https://www.unenvironment.org/youngchampions/news/story/bringing-recycling-kuwait>

The Way Forward

The UN Decade presents a myriad of opportunities for faith actors to participate in ecosystem restoration, to protect intact ecosystems and repair degraded ones. The ten actions seek to guide stakeholders to participate in the UN Decade, especially by demonstrating some existing projects and initiatives by faith actors. However, to implement the actions and foster cooperation between faith actors and regional/international environmental organisations, the following key actions are necessary.

i. Build Capacity on Global Knowledge and Scientific Evidence

While a great deal of importance is placed on indigenous and traditional cultural practices, the age of the Anthropocene demands that the same is coupled with access and integration of global knowledge and standards, and scientific evidence for sustainable impact. Doing so strengthens the relationship between environmental stewardship and duty of care for resilient environmental solutions.

Faith for Earth is strategically placed to enhance a global network facilitating the exchange of practices, experiences, and lessons learnt connecting south to south and north to south and vice-versa. South-south cooperation has proven to be effective in enabling technology and knowledge transfer stimulating the green economy. [‘Our Sacred Commitment’](#) is endorsed to communicate a commitment by faith-based organizations to take concrete, scientifically-guided action to protect and restore nature, bolstering [The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions](#) in line with the theme of UNEA 5. The Commitment called for the creation of the Faith for Earth Coalition – in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme – to enable faith groups to promote action and influence policy decisions at the local, national, regional and international levels towards achieving the SDGs. The Faith for Earth Coalition aims to drive the same as a platform for multi-stakeholder, interreligious dialogue through four Councils:

1. The Council of Eminent Leaders: Composed of high-level faith leaders representing major and minor world religions in terms of number of adherents.
2. The Youth Council: Composed of young faith leaders and members of youth movements advocating for living in respect and harmony with planet earth.
3. The Network of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of FBO’s: Composed of faith-based organizations with a focus on the environment or those working with (local) faith communities responding to the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. The Faith-Science Consortium: Composed of theologians, scientists and environmentalists to bridge the gap between environmental science and religions.

Faith leaders are therefore encouraged to engage in such networks with an aim to contribute to existing knowledge platforms to link indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and science-based knowledge to strengthen religious arguments with visible evidence for ecosystem restoration.

ii. Strengthen Partnerships with Faith Leaders for Policy Impact

The UN Decade signals a global push to cities, regions, investors for a healthy, resilient, zero carbon recovery to ActNow⁴⁴ towards the Race to Zero.⁴⁵ Religious and spiritual leaders, whether high level or youth leaders, have the ear of the people, essential in identifying drivers

⁴⁴ <https://www.un.org/actnow>

⁴⁵ <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign>

of deforestation or poor ecosystem management, as well as the voice to influence behavioural attitudes with a strong presence. The grassroots connection is critical in identifying drivers of deforestation and driving national conservation and restoration efforts by spearheading policy discussions that are sensitive to social conditions.

iii. Actively Engage

It is essential to strengthen the common ground focus of each partner for mutual support at local, regional and global levels. UN Environment, Faith for Earth, the UN Decade all require active support in its campaigns and initiatives by partners to deliver services, or advocate for impact. The perspective presented, with faith leaders and communities at the heart of ecosystem conservation and restoration, celebrates the cultural, religious, and environmental diversities that faith communities present- essential to achieving the SDGs.

The Emissions Gap Report 2020⁴⁶ estimates that a low-carbon green pandemic recovery can cut approximately 25% off the greenhouse emissions by 2030. However, stronger action to facilitate, encourage and mandate change in consumption behaviour by individuals and the private sector is needed from responsible leadership.

⁴⁶ <https://www.unenvironment.org/emissions-gap-report-2020>