



Disasters: Religious Roles and Priorities for G20 Engagement

Katherine Marshall

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ABOUT THE G20 INTERFAITH FORUM

The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) offers a platform where religious and interfaith institutions and initiatives can engage on global agendas. Founded in 2014, the IF20 has accompanied the work of the G20, whose agenda evolves from year to year with its rotating presidency, and supported global efforts to realize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The IF20 produces publications and hosts convenings and online events throughout the year as well as a signature annual gathering, the G20 Interfaith Forum, which brings together religious leaders and other stakeholders in G20 host countries to address G20 priorities and the wider global agenda.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disasters and acute emergencies are occurring with growing frequency, reach, and impact across every world region. They demand rapid mobilization of resources, upend carefully laid plans, reverse development gains, and often deepen existing inequalities. Floods, famines, earthquakes, and other crises differ in their causes, speed, and predictability; what links them is their capacity to cause profound disruption and overwhelm established systems. Pandemics share many of these characteristics, although their transmission patterns and response requirements place them in a distinct category. Community responses can strengthen solidarity, but disasters too often erode social cohesion and leave long-lasting physical, economic, and psychological legacies. Earthquakes, fires, floods, extreme heat, and technological failures test the resilience of public institutions, infrastructure, social-protection systems, and, especially, rapidly growing cities. Such events have shaped human history, but climate change, environmental degradation, urbanization, and contemporary settlement patterns are increasing exposure to many hazards, accentuating links among disasters and amplifying and extending their impact. Effective policy responses therefore must move beyond episodic humanitarian relief toward sustained investment in risk reduction, preparedness, anticipatory action, and equitable, long-term recovery. This requires inclusive institutions and coordinated strategies operating from the community level to national, regional and global systems.

South Africa made strengthening disaster resilience and response an overarching priority of its 2025 G20 presidency. Pertinent G20 outcome documents – the G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Ministerial Declaration, the Voluntary High-Level Principles for Investing in Disaster Risk Reduction, the Recovery Readiness Assessment Framework, and the Johannesburg Leaders’ Declaration – call for whole-of-society approaches, locally led action, last-mile early warning, pre-arranged finance, and inclusive recovery. None of these documents, however, have explicitly identified religious leaders, faith communities, faith-inspired organizations, or houses of worship as partners or institutions that are themselves exposed to disaster risk.

This omission matters. Religious institutions are often among the first organizations (local and international) present and mobilized after a disaster, even when they are not formally designated or technically trained first responders. Their buildings, volunteers, communication networks, service institutions, and relationships of trust can support warning systems, evacuation efforts, shelter, food distribution, emergency cash, health care, psychosocial support, and long-term recovery. Faith-linked international networks can mobilize specialist personnel and finance. These capacities are not, however, automatic or universal. Deliberate coordination can strengthen and amplify their impact by better linking them to humanitarian strategies and the knowledge and approaches of other actors. Faith teachings and beliefs play significant roles in the quality of resilience.

The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) proposes a practical agenda: map religious capacities and vulnerabilities more systematically before disasters, include appropriate faith representatives in planning and coordination, train local leaders and volunteers, connect faith communication systems to early warning protocols, certify disaster-safe houses of worship and religious buildings, establish accessible financing for local response, and measure results. The objective is neither to privilege religious actors nor to substitute faith groups for government. It is to ensure that this vast set of communities is responsibly integrated into prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

This review has five objectives: it highlights the wide range of religious roles across the disaster cycle; briefly describes international and national institutional arrangements for response and finance; highlights illustrative experience, especially in 2025 and 2026; points to risks and safeguards; and proposes concrete steps through which G20 institutions, governments, and engagement groups could strengthen appropriate collaboration.

1. G20 Priorities and Faith Roles in Disaster Response

The 2025 G20 Summit process framed disasters as predictable threats to sustainable development, fiscal stability, infrastructure, and equality. It emphasized prevention, anticipatory action, multi-hazard early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, adaptive social protection, pre-arranged finance, and “Build Back Better” recovery. It called for participation by civil society organizations, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and other stakeholders. This broad language could encompass religious actors, but the principal 2025 G20 outcome documents do not name them explicitly. This gap is illustrative of both the complexity of the religious institutional landscape and a broad tendency of many institutions to exclude religious actors in their accounting and strategic planning. Policy and practice therefore need to connect priorities such as localization, rebuilding trust, last-mile communication, and community infrastructure to identifiable religious institutions and networks.

The 2025 IF20 process, including the August 2025 Cape Town Forum, highlighted the roles of faith communities as “spiritual first responders,” calling for their more systematic inclusion in disaster planning, warning dissemination, preparedness exercises, and coordination structures. The analysis and recommendations stand today, their importance reinforced by recent disaster experience.

Faith actors contribute throughout the disaster cycle, from risk reduction and community preparedness to immediate relief and long-term recovery and reconstruction. Religious roles range from spontaneous neighborhood mobilization to highly institutionalized humanitarian operations. Faith communities include local congregations, physical buildings and centers like monasteries, mosques, and temples, and Indigenous religious communities. Also relevant are national denominational bodies, professional faith-based humanitarian agencies, religious health and education systems, interfaith councils, diaspora networks, and individual religious leaders. Many religious institutions bring the deep community roots, trusted relationships, communication networks, physical infrastructure, organizational continuity, and moral authority that are sorely needed when disasters strike. These assets, however, vary considerably by place, tradition, and community. Effective policy therefore needs to distinguish among different kinds of religious actors and appreciate how they fit in the relevant context. Interreligious coordinating bodies, where they exist and function effectively, can provide a valuable interface with government and humanitarian systems, while prior mapping can identify relevant institutions, facilities, networks, and capacities. The central policy challenge is to determine which actors are trusted (and by whom), what capacities they possess, what standards and accountability mechanisms govern their work, and how they can complement public institutions and the wider humanitarian system.

A barrier to effective integration and partnership, particularly with local actors, is the fragmented evidence base, much of which is produced by responding organizations themselves. Self-reporting is valuable for identifying activity but generally insufficient for assessing comparative advantage or impact. Better documentation and analysis are needed to distinguish organizational monitoring, affected-community testimony, government or UN reporting, and independent evaluation. Nevertheless, immediate action necessarily combines planned and spontaneous responses, beginning with affected people and nearby institutions. Rapid assessment and an inclusive understanding of potential partners are therefore essential.

Table: Religious Contributions Across the Disaster Cycle

Phase	Potential contribution	Questions for policy and practice
Risk reduction	Relationships with communities. Risk communication, environmental stewardship, advocacy, livelihood protection, and identification of vulnerable households.	Are faith communities part of assessments in meaningful and inclusive ways? Are policy measures demonstrably connected to reducing exposure or vulnerability? How are minority and marginalized communities included?
Preparedness	Volunteer rosters, drills, safe buildings, evacuation plans, warning dissemination, pre-positioned supplies, and referral systems.	Are buildings structurally safe? Are volunteers trained and insured? Are they connected to official command and planning systems? How?
Immediate response	Shelter, meals, emergency cash, local information, translation, transport, health care, and referrals.	Are responses tracked and assessed? Are coordination and support mechanisms in place? Does assistance follow humanitarian principles and transparent, non-discriminatory criteria?
Protection and care	Outreach to isolated groups, bereavement rituals, spiritual care, psychological first aid, and safeguarding.	Are services voluntary, culturally appropriate, and connected to professional care when needed? Are known challenges, including those involving burial practices, identified and addressed?
Recovery	Rebuilding homes and livelihoods, restoring services and worship spaces, social cohesion, accountability, and long-term accompaniment.	Does reconstruction reduce future risk? Do affected communities shape priorities and monitor resources? Are obstacles and opportunities for financial support assessed with a “faith lens”?

2. Disaster Response Frameworks

The world’s contemporary disaster response architecture (including transnational mechanisms for finance) is extensive but fragmented. Prevention, humanitarian response, recovery, climate adaptation, and development finance often operate through different institutions, budgets, and professional communities. The UNDRR 2026 Global Risk Report notes that while perceptions of the largest risks has shifted (in this instance towards risks of large scale war), the central priority remains the same: joint action. In looking to improvements in coordination and especially better integration of faith communities, some background on mandated organizations and financing is helpful.

Modern emergency-response institutions grew from nineteenth-century humanitarian initiatives. An important historical marker was the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863). The overall system was expanded significantly after World War II, through UN agencies (notably UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR, and WFP), the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, civil defense authorities, and international NGOs with a relief focus (several of the latter, such as Catholic Relief Services—CRS—and Tzu Chi, were creations of specific faith communities). Major disasters in the 1970s–80s prompted measures to strengthen the overall system. UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991) established the Emergency Relief Coordinator and structures that evolved into the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Since 2005, what is known as the cluster system assigns sectoral leadership during major crises. Disaster prevention and preparedness has developed along a parallel track, from the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and the 1994 Yokohama Strategy to the Hyogo Framework (2005–15) and today’s Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–30. Strategies are overseen internationally by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). National governments have the primary responsibility from start to finish, normally working through national disaster-management agencies, civil-protection services, local authorities, armed forces, and emergency health systems. A wide range of regional bodies, meteorological services, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement (IFRC), civil society (including many faith communities), and international agencies provide support when domestic capacity is strained.

International disaster finance is similarly diverse but chronically inadequate and weighted toward response far more than prevention. Bilateral agencies, UN and NGO appeals, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), country-based pooled funds, Red Cross emergency funds, and private giving finance immediate relief. Multilateral development banks provide reconstruction loans, grants, contingent credit, and instruments such as catastrophe bonds, while governments increasingly use reserves and regional insurance pools such as CCRIF (for the Caribbean), the African Risk Capacity Group, and the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative.

Coordination takes different forms, especially through national authorities and emergency operations centers, OCHA’s humanitarian-country teams and clusters, the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination system, the IASC, and IFRC mechanisms. For recovery, the World Bank, UN agencies, and the European Union often support government-led assessments.

The 2026 Report on the State of the Humanitarian System observes that the global humanitarian system reached its largest size, with, in 2024, 5,600 humanitarian organizations with approximately 835,000 staff (80,000 more than in 2021), with local and national non-governmental organizations (L/NNGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) accounting for 81% of entities. However, budgets abruptly contracted due to a funding collapse. International humanitarian assistance (IHA) fell by around 30%, from a peak of US\$47.5 billion in 2022 to an estimated US\$33.3 billion in 2025. Among the world’s 20 largest humanitarian donors, 13 reduced their contributions that year. The United States alone cut 55% (US\$7.4 billion) of its humanitarian funding, while the UN-coordinated appeal was only 35% funded.

Countries facing climate-related disasters can draw on the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, Global Environment Facility (GEF), multilateral development bank climate windows, and the newly established Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage. These resources, however, are small relative to escalating losses, difficult procedurally and rarely quickly available for vulnerable countries to access, and imperfectly connected to humanitarian finance. Humanitarian appeals are routinely severely underfunded – OCHA recorded only about \$28.3 billion in reported humanitarian funding during 2025. CERF’s resources remain below its \$1 billion annual target despite its central role in rapid and neglected emergencies. The central policy challenge is therefore less the absence of mechanisms than insufficient, fragmented, and often unpredictable funding; weak connections between anticipatory action, relief, and long-term recovery; and persistent underinvestment in local institutions, preparedness, and risk reduction before disasters occur.

The explicit involvement of religious organizations is more clearly defined in humanitarian response than in disaster risk or climate finance governance. Religiously linked agencies are embedded in the international humanitarian system chiefly as nongovernmental organizations, not as representatives of religious denominations as such. Caritas Internationalis, Lutheran World Federation, and World Vision International participate through the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, which has standing-invitee status in the IASC. ACT Alliance, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Christian Aid, Catholic Relief Services, ADRA, Church World Service, and national faith-based agencies regularly participate in UN country teams, clusters, and humanitarian-response plans. They may receive allocations from OCHA-managed country-based pooled funds, although CERF funds reach them only indirectly through recipient UN agencies. The OCHA Financial Tracking Service records funding to organizations such as Islamic Relief and ACT Alliance members, and the Grand Bargain’s localization agenda can benefit national and local religious organizations. UNHCR has developed particularly explicit faith partnerships, including its 2012 Dialogue on Faith and Protection and subsequent guidance for working with faith-based organizations, religious leaders, and faith communities. The Red Cross and Red Crescent movement also has historic religious origins and symbols, but legally and operationally defines itself as impartial and nonsectarian rather than explicitly based on religious faith.

Links to religious roles and communities are weaker and less systematic in prevention, national planning, and climate finance. The Sendai Framework’s “all-of-society” approach permits religious institutions to participate as civil society stakeholders, and faith-based organizations can register Sendai voluntary commitments, but neither Sendai nor UNDRR assigns them a defined institutional role. At national and local levels, arrangements vary considerably. Governments sometimes include churches, Islamic councils, Buddhist organizations, traditional leaders, and faith-run health or relief networks in emergency committees, evacuation planning, early-warning dissemination, and shelter management, but such engagement is rarely standardized. ACT Alliance members – including DanChurchAid, Finn Church Aid, Norwegian Church Aid, and Lutheran World Federation – combine disaster preparedness with humanitarian response, while Caritas, Islamic Relief, World Vision and others implement climate adaptation projects funded by governments and multilateral agencies. The Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage have no dedicated faith community window or formal religious advisory mechanism. Faith-linked organizations generally gain access as implementing partners or subgrantees of accredited institutions.

At the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), in Istanbul on 23–24 May 2016, a formal Special Session on Religious Engagement and preparatory consultations in seven cities highlighted the reach, local knowledge, volunteer networks, resilience-building capacity, and long-term presence of local faith communities and faith-based organizations. This was documented by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI), which played instrumental roles in organizing the effort. The Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action, endorsed by more than 160 actors from major religious traditions and diverse regions, committed signatories to humanitarian principles and impartial assistance; stronger participation in coordination and decision-making; protection of women and girls; accountability to affected populations; and spiritual support without pressure to participate in religious practices. This recognition complemented the Summit’s broader emphasis on locally led response—particularly pertinent as religious institutions are often present before international agencies arrive and remain after they leave. The faith engagement, however, was more visible in the dedicated session, charter, and side events than in the Summit’s central institutional reforms, leaving continuing challenges around direct financing, equitable partnership, religious literacy, safeguarding, and the systematic inclusion of local faith actors in humanitarian coordination. This was followed by a Forum on Localizing Response to Humanitarian Need in October 2017 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. It focused on learning from Sri Lankan religious leaders and FBOs and from participants from other countries, as a follow on from the WHS, responding to and reinforcing the localization of aid/Grand Bargain discussions, and designed to produce a body of evidence on questions of HOW to engage local faith actors, and actions to scale up their engagement as local partners.

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and 2017 follow up marked perhaps the most coherent effort thus far to bring diverse religious actors into global humanitarian policy discussions, albeit limited to a voluntary charter and network of commitments rather than a permanent coordination or financing mechanism. Regional and national initiatives—notably Humanitarian Forum Indonesia, ACT Alliance forums, Asia-Pacific faith coalitions, and African interreligious cooperation during the Ebola and other health emergencies—offer important operational models, but remain geographically, institutionally, or thematically fragmented. There is a growing body of evaluations and research on faith responses to different crises, but most focus on specific situations and locations.

Thus religious actors are operationally important and often among the earliest community institutions to mobilize, but they are underrepresented in formal coordination, preparedness planning, and climate-finance decision-making.

3. Faith Responses in Disaster Situations: Examples

Faith actors are on the frontlines of disaster prevention, preparedness, and response. They lead community-level responses, mobilize resources, focus international attention to disaster-impacted communities, and collaborate with other humanitarian actors and across sectors. The table above notes different categories of faith responses to the diverse disasters and different stages. As illustrations of the specific nature and patterns of response, some recent examples are highlighted here.

Risk reduction and preparedness

Faith actors are often not included in formal planning processes and decision-making mechanisms for disaster preparedness, even though they have much to offer in training, capacity building, and resource mobilization. Yet as more governments recognize the important role that local communities play in disaster response, more formal engagement mechanisms are being established. In the U.S., the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), has published a guide for emergency managers to engage with faith-based organizations in disaster preparedness and response. FEMA also runs Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VALs), which link FEMA to external groups working on disaster response and recovery, including faith and community groups. VALs provide technical assistance to strengthen collaboration with the government before, during, and after disasters and connecting local organizations to resources during a disaster response. Similar government partnerships with civil society and faith-based organizations exist in other countries, including Japan, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom.

Numerous faith-based organizations provide resources on disaster preparedness to religious communities. Episcopal Relief & Development’s “Pastors and Disasters” toolkit helps Episcopalian and Anglican faith leaders worldwide prepare for disasters by outlining tools such as early warning systems, identifying evacuation centers, and establishing communication channels in advance. Similar guides have been produced by Tearfund, National Disaster Interfaith Network, and Islamic Relief Worldwide (the latter focuses on conflict zones more broadly but includes information on resilience and disaster risk reduction). Many faith-based organizations and religious communities also hold community capacity-building trainings in disaster-prone areas, including ADRA in Europe and the Philippines, the Humanitarian Forum Indonesia and Islamic Relief Indonesia, and Tearfund.

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Response and recovery efforts

Myanmar Earthquake, March 2025

The magnitude 7.7 earthquake in Myanmar offers a revealing case. Buddhist monasteries provided shelter and local assistance where conflict and military rule constrained government and humanitarian access. World Vision documented Buddhist and Christian leaders identifying needs, organizing assistance, and calling for stronger partnership between local faith institutions and international agencies. International faith organizations added different capacities: Samaritan’s Purse deployed an emergency field hospital, surgical care, and water treatment, while Catholic and Adventist agencies worked through established local partners.

Religious institutions were also among the disaster’s victims. Thousands of monasteries, pagodas, nunneries, and mosques were damaged or destroyed, and large numbers of Buddhist monks and Muslim worshippers reportedly died in collapsed religious buildings. The case demonstrates why pre-disaster mapping should consider religious institutions simultaneously as response assets, culturally important sites, and vulnerable infrastructure. It also highlights the need to monitor whether assistance reaches religious minorities and communities in areas outside government control.

Los Angeles Wildfires, January 2025

Among notable responders to the wildfires, Tzu Chi USA mobilized Buddhist volunteers and service centers to distribute cash cards, blankets, and essential supplies and to provide emotional and spiritual support. By February 2025, Tzu Chi reported helping more than 14,000 people, among them approximately 3,800 families who received gift cards. Its subsequent assistance efforts included a mobile eye clinic for people who had lost eyeglasses in the fires. The combination of flexible cash, practical services, and sustained accompaniment illustrates how a religious organization can bridge relief and recovery.

The fires also produced a significant interfaith response. After the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center was destroyed, First United Methodist Church in Pasadena shared its facilities with the displaced Jewish congregation while continuing to host Muslim Friday prayers. This protected religious practice, social continuity, and mutual support, dimensions of recovery often overlooked in assessments focused only on physical destruction. The loss of more than a dozen houses of worship reinforced the importance of protecting religious and cultural infrastructure.

Texas Hill Country Floods, July 2025

Congregations in Kerr County became hubs for accommodation, supplies, and coordination after the deadly floods. Kerrville Bible Church housed Samaritan’s Purse volunteers; Citywest Church opened its facilities to relief organizations and rescue teams; and Mercy Chefs prepared large numbers of meals. Local congregations supported cleanup, distribution of supplies, vigils, and counseling for bereaved families. The response illustrates a productive division of labor: congregations contributed buildings, local knowledge, volunteers, and relationships; specialist FBOs brought logistics, equipment and mass-catering capacity; and public authorities retained responsibility for rescue, safety, and overall coordination.

The case also highlights the need for care in using terminology. Faith communities may be the first present and first to mobilize, though untrained volunteers are not equivalent to professional fire, rescue, police, or emergency-medical personnel. Agreed protocols and appropriate training are important for all.

Eastern Afghanistan Earthquake, August 2025

Following the earthquake in eastern Afghanistan, Islamic Relief used its established national presence to provide emergency assistance and mobilize support, grounded partly in Islamic giving traditions, including zakat and sadaqah. The setting highlights the importance of locally knowledgeable staff, imams, and community councils, as well as culturally appropriate arrangements for shelter, burial, bereavement, and psychosocial support. It also presents difficult questions regarding the protection of women and girls, minority communities, and remote settlements; access and inclusion of these groups cannot be assumed simply because an organization shares the majority religious tradition.

Cebu Earthquake, September 2025

After the Cebu earthquake in the Philippines, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cebu suspended the use of churches in affected areas and ordered structural assessments of churches and rectories. Catholic networks and other faith actors also supported relief efforts and community care. The decision to close potentially unsafe buildings is an important preparedness lesson: houses of worship should not automatically be used as shelters or distribution centers without structural assessment and public safety approval.

Earthquakes in Indonesia, Venezuela, and Colombia, June and August 2026

Early assessments of several disasters that occurred in 2026 illustrate both emerging patterns and the limits of evidence produced during an ongoing response.

Following the August 2026 earthquake in Flores, Indonesia, ADRA teams and local Adventist church leaders undertook rapid needs assessments as rescue and recovery continued, illustrating the potential value of pre-identified congregational focal points.

After earthquakes in Venezuela and Colombia, ACT Alliance’s response linked local churches and national members with international humanitarian finance. Religions for Peace has likewise mobilized interreligious networks to respond. These cases demonstrate the presence and potential mobilization of cross-border religious networks, locally led assessment, and the transition from emergency relief to reconstruction.

Nepal-Tibet floods, August 2026

The August 2026 floods along the Nepal-Tibet border illustrate the multiple roles played by religious actors during disasters. Local Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist volunteers reportedly entered isolated communities on foot or by motorcycle, opened surviving buildings, conducted assessments, and distributed food, water, shelter materials, and medical supplies. National organizations, including United Mission to Nepal, Caritas Nepal, and Nepali church networks, connected these community capacities with international finance and logistics from UMCOR, ACT Alliance, the World Evangelical Alliance, and other faith-linked agencies. A Buddhist monastery in Kathmandu became an evacuation center for survivors, many from affected Tamang communities. Karuna-Schechen, a Buddhist-inspired organization with a longstanding presence in the Himalayan region, mobilized local teams to provide immediate emergency relief and undertake needs assessments. Help is ongoing, with a focus on reaching affected communities in the most remote areas. Numerous Hindu-affiliated organizations are likewise involved in relief efforts, including Sewa International.

These examples show that faith communities can be among the first community institutions to respond and that their roles often remain distinct from those of statutory emergency services. They also demonstrate that religious institutions may simultaneously be responders, sources of psychosocial and spiritual support, custodians of cultural continuity, and victims requiring assistance. The uneven documentation of Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu initiatives points to the need for more inclusive mapping of local religious actors before disasters occur.

Institutional models

No comprehensive assessment captures the full diversity of religious engagement in disasters, and the largest evidence gaps concern local community responses. Available experience nevertheless points to recurring assets: sustained local presence, detailed knowledge of communities, trusted relationships, extensive buildings and communication networks, capacity to organize volunteers, and access to national, diaspora, or international resources. These strengths vary widely and should not be presumed.

The examples of responses demonstrate the reach and adaptability of faith-based networks. ACT Alliance, for example, links churches and church-related organizations across more than 120 countries. Its comparative value lies in combining local member presence with international standards and finance. Organizations such as Islamic Relief Worldwide, World Vision, Caritas Internationalis, ADRA, and Tzu Chi are important faith-linked operational actors and partners; other bodies, including the Bahá’í International Community, contribute principally through advocacy, convening, and community-level initiatives. However, there is ample scope to develop and better link comparable networks both as sources of knowledge, timely information, and coordination, and as bridges across sectoral, historical, and geographic boundaries.

The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** implemented 569 relief projects worldwide in 2025, implemented through local churches and partnerships with governments and humanitarian organizations. LDS collaborations assisted following earthquakes in Myanmar and Vanuatu, floods in Nigeria and the Republic of the Congo, and wildfires in southern California. Church buildings served as shelters and operational staging areas, and family counselors provided psychological assistance. The church runs Helping Hands, a community service volunteer program active in disaster areas. Volunteer activities include clearing debris, repairing homes, distributing food and emergency supplies, assisting evacuation centers, restoring schools and public spaces, and supporting longer-term community projects. Helping hands operates through local congregations and regional leadership, often alongside governments, the Red Cross, and other humanitarian organizations.

Episcopal Relief & Development (ERD) supports disaster preparedness, emergency response, and long-term recovery through its network of Episcopal and Anglican churches and dioceses. Recent interventions include aid to communities affected by earthquakes in Venezuela (July 2026), wildfires in Washington State (August 2026), flooding in Texas (July 2025) and Hawaii (April 2026), and droughts in Kenya (February 2026). On-the-ground assistance involves supporting local partners in distributing essential supplies and vouchers, providing temporary shelter, repairing infrastructure, and offering psychosocial support. ERD’s “Pastors and Disasters” toolkit provides information to churches on setting up warning systems, evacuation centers, and communication channels to better prepare for future emergencies. ERD also provides training and financial support to local partners before and after disasters.

Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) was founded in 1984 in response to the devastating famine in the Horn of Africa. Disaster relief remains a core pillar of its mandate; in 2025 and 2026, IRW implemented emergency and recovery projects in over 40 countries affected by natural disasters, conflict, and related humanitarian crises. IRW provided food, hygiene kits, medical care, and temporary shelter to victims of earthquakes in Afghanistan and Venezuela, floods in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and extreme weather in East Africa. IRW partners with local staff, community networks, and governments in planning and implementing its emergency response, which also includes repairing damaged infrastructure, supporting livelihoods, and helping communities create disaster response plans.

The **Tzu Chi Foundation** has been active in disaster relief in Taiwan since the 1970s and internationally since 1991, when it responded to floods in Bangladesh. Tzu Chi relies on a broad network of volunteers and local contacts to respond to both the immediate and long-term impacts of disasters; response efforts include providing emergency food, clothing, and medicine, as well as rebuilding homes and schools, building water supply system, and operating free medical clinics. Recent relief efforts include providing relief to victims of flooding in Taiwan (September 2025), Nepal (August 2026) and India (July 2026); earthquakes in Indonesia (August 2026) and Japan (July 2026); and a typhoon in the Philippines and Vietnam (November 2025).

4. Risks, Safeguards, and Limits

Religious engagement is not inherently inclusive or effective. Credible policy needs to address foreseeable risks as well as preconceptions in policy circles (however partial); relying on the many affirming examples is insufficient. Perceived and actual risks and negative experience can color attitudes and assumptions of policymakers, detracting from coordination and partnerships. Principal risks and limitations include the following:

- Large international FBOs attract visibility and finance while local religious actors carry much of the response burden without adequate support.
- In conflict settings, (perceived) alignment with government, opposition forces, or a single religious community can undermine neutrality and access.
- Religious teachings can encourage solidarity and resilience but may likewise discourage evacuation, use of medical care, or risk reduction measures.
- Selection of disaster relief beneficiaries may reproduce discrimination and exclusion based on creed, ethnicity, political affiliation, gender identity, etc.
- Aid may be conditioned, or perceived to be conditioned, on religious participation or conversion.
- Untrained volunteers may enter unsafe environments, interfere with professional rescue, or mishandle sensitive information.
- Weak safeguarding, complaints, or financial controls can expose affected people to abuse or can lead to the misuse of funds.

Addressing these risks begins with recognizing religious organizations as valuable partners within accountable systems rather than substitutes for state responsibility. Partnership agreements need to specify minimum safeguards, including adherence to humanitarian principles and relevant professional standards. Assistance must be allocated impartially, according to need and without religious tests, discrimination, or preferential treatment; it should ever be conditioned on participation in worship, religious instruction, or conversion. This principle has significance beyond individual organizations and requires broad and consistent affirmation across the humanitarian system. Safeguarding and referral protocols should apply universally, supported by transparent financing, clearly defined beneficiary selection criteria, and accessible complaint and remedy mechanisms. Deliberate measures are also needed to include religious minorities, people without religious affiliation, and other marginalized communities (including women and youth). Even under crisis conditions, religious actors should coordinate proactively with public authorities, humanitarian agencies, and other community organizations, while preserving the independence required by humanitarian principles.

5. Recommendations for G20 and Multi Sector Engagement

Faith communities are neither peripheral to disaster response nor automatically effective, inclusive, or accountable partners. They constitute a diverse field of local institutions, service providers, humanitarian agencies, leaders, and volunteer networks. When trained, operating with appropriate safeguards, and connected to public coordination, their local presence, buildings, communications, and capacity for sustained accompaniment can be invaluable in improving preparedness, equitable response, and long-term recovery. Their exclusion can amplify coordination problems but, more important, miss important resources that have immediate and lasting benefits. Translating these insights into common practice requires better knowledge of what different institutions do and can do, together with sustained efforts to address barriers to appropriate integration and support.

The 2025 G20 framework presents the necessary policy vocabulary: whole-of-society action, localization, last-mile warning systems, anticipatory finance, and recovery readiness. The next step is to translate that vocabulary into practical institutional arrangements that explicitly and responsibly include religious actors.

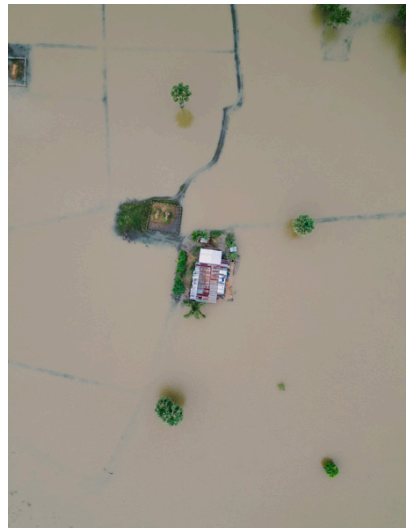
The following practical steps represent an agenda for IF20 networks and partners, G20 governments, and the broader G20 community, including different G20 engagement groups.

1. Include religious and faith-linked institutions in national and local disaster-capacity mapping, disaggregated by institution type, function, geographic reach, communities served, and vulnerability.
2. Establish or expand appropriate religious-community liaison mechanisms within national and subnational disaster platforms. Representation should be periodically reviewed to ensure that religious diversity is accounted for, including minority religions and nonreligious communities.
3. Build on training guides and modules prepared by faith organizations for relevant staff, notably pastors (examples include Tearfund, Episcopal Relief, and ADRA).
4. Assess and pre-certify suitable houses of worship and religious buildings that can be used as shelters, distribution points, or community information centers.
5. Provide training for priority faith leaders and volunteers in early warning, evacuation, safeguarding, psychological first aid, referral, humanitarian principles, and coordination procedures.
6. Connect faith communication networks to last-mile warning systems, including clear protocols for translating technical alerts into trusted, actionable messages.
7. Create small, rapid, and accessible financing windows for qualified local religious and interfaith organizations, paired with proportionate accountability requirements.
8. Require nondiscrimination and safeguarding standards for all publicly or multilaterally financed faith-linked responses. Prohibit proselytization or actions that tie assistance to participation in worship, religious instruction, affiliation, or conversion.

9. Take steps (including mapping of religious landscapes and outreach to communities) to ensure the inclusion of religious minorities, people without religious affiliation, women, young people, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.
10. Include damaged religious and cultural infrastructure in needs assessments in cases where it provides essential community services, protects significant heritage, or is important to social and psychological recovery, and where collecting such information is safe and appropriate.
11. Conduct reviews with local faith actors and affected communities following disaster relief efforts; incorporate findings into revised plans and drills.
12. Identify meaningful indicators that take account of the religious landscape and sensitivities that assess people reached, services delivered, resources used, inclusion, complaints and remedies, partnerships, and the duration and outcomes of recovery support.
13. Review disaster finance eligibility, application, and reporting requirements to identify unnecessary access barriers to qualified local religious and interfaith organizations. Assure proportionate fiduciary, safeguarding, and accountability standards.

To support the recommendations focused on landscape mapping, a common case study template could substantially improve the evidence base. Such a template should record the hazard and setting; religious actors and institutions providing assistance; actions taken before, during and after the disaster; people and areas reached; expenditures and sources of funds; public and humanitarian partners; inclusion and safeguarding arrangements; complaints and corrective action; duration of engagement; and independently observed outcomes. Comparative work should also examine where religious engagement failed, excluded, or did not provide additional assistance to that already available from other actors.

he G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group, relevant official tracks, and G20 Engagement Groups should develop a shared action plan. Relevant partners include Civil 20, Think 20, Women 20, Youth 20, Urban 20 and Business 20. Their collaboration could connect local trust and social infrastructure with finance, urban resilience, communications technology, gender inclusion, youth mobilization and private-sector logistics.



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