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The SDG Framework
Faith Engagement and Challenges

By Katherine Marshall



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.

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD)

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) is a nonprofit organization housed within Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. WFDD explores the role of religion and faith-inspired organizations in global development, fostering dialogue and innovative partnerships to promote inclusive development outcomes. The project, "Towards better strategic religious-development engagement: Exploring and comparing challenges through Education and Social Protection," funded by the Templeton Religion Trust, seeks to strengthen religious-development engagement through dialogue and innovative country-level approaches. It begins by analyzing gaps in engagement and perspectives on education and social protection.



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THE REPORT AND RECCOMENDATIONS, COMMISSIONED BY THE BOARD

This publication, produced by an editorial team at the World Faiths Development Dialogue, is one of four reports with recommendations prepared for the IF20 in the run-up to the G20 Interfaith Forum in Salt Lake City from October 15-17, 2026. The result of six months of extended consultations across the faith sector – including during a Faith for Impact Forum hosted at Georgetown in May 2026 – the reports are designed to identify ways forward in interfaith cooperation around G20 priorities. The report recommendations, approved by the IF20 Board, are designed to spur further reflection and shared action. They do not represent a settled consensus within a diverse and vibrant global faith community. All four reports and their appendices are available on the IF20 website.

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Executive Summary

"We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind."

-United Nations, 2030 Agenda forSustainable Development, 2015

Since 2014, the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) has addressed the roles and responsibilities of diverse and complex religious communities within the G20 context. As an organization drawing on diverse networks, IF20 balances efforts to respond to the immediate agendas of G20 members and host country priorities but also to bring the shared priorities of religious communities more prominently to action agendas. A core assumption at the heart of the IF20 mandate and ethos is that religious communities are essential actors in global governance platforms and institutions, the G20 among them. The challenge is to define appropriate "seats" at appropriate "tables" and to identify the most pertinent, compelling, and excellent policy and program perspectives for the topic at issue.



The G20, notable for its informal structure and effort to balance inclusion and exclusion within global governance institutions, was launched in 1999 with an explicitly economic focus. Since then, it has provided a distinctive governance platform to address both the immediate challenges facing global leaders (the COVID-19 pandemic, transnational conflicts, for example) and the increasingly acknowledged intersections among the wide range of issues that confront leaders at national and international levels. The wide-ranging challenges embodied in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a continuing agenda that the G20 and IF20 address from varying perspectives.

Among the difficult decisions facing leaders everywhere, especially those confronting the extraordinary array of intricately enmeshed global crises, are setting priorities for action. Religious communities - with their grounding in communities, millennia of ethical teachings, and engagement across each and every SDG goal and target - have much to offer here, with opportunities that extend from the most local, personal, and immediate (addressing child marriage, for example) to the most global and long- term (peace and security, threats to the global environment).

A constant theme for religious communities and thus the IF20 is what the UN SDG framework refers to as "leave no one behind" and the Catholic Church terms the "preferential option for the poor." This translates at the broadest levels into a continuing focus on poverty, inequality, prosperity, and human flourishing. It represents the north star for the IF20 and grounds our recommendations for action. Today, the need for urgent action to address the challenges of hunger, thirst, and insecurity stand out. With stunning progress in human welfare in recent decades, marked notably by better health outcomes, longer lives, and greater access to education and knowledge, we believe that working to assure decent lives for all people is a reasonable and achievable goal. But the challenges of armed conflict, widespread insecurity, fiscal pressures, and a vertigo linked to polarized societies call for resets, fresh thinking, and bold action.

This report navigates actions, priorities, and proposals of diverse religious communities across the SDG framework. It highlights priority challenges linked to humanitarian and development issues. More broadly, it represents a partial "mapping" of the work of different faith communities, institutions, and networks most relevant to the SDG framework and thus the G20.

Introduction

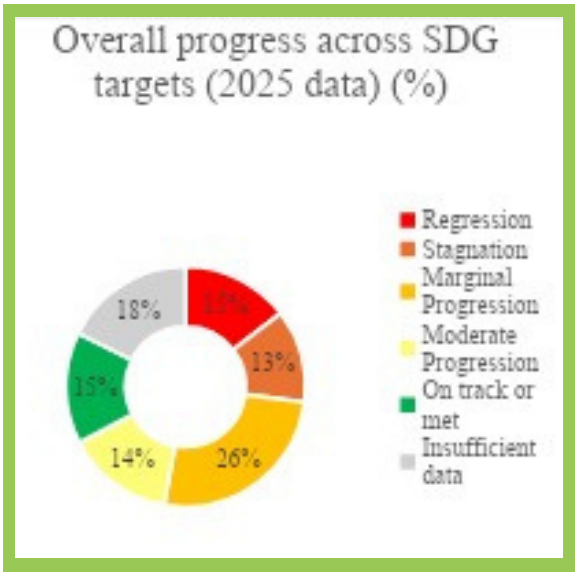
The 2026 G20 Agenda

As host of the 2026 G20 Summit and its associated processes, the U.S. government has identified three priorities as the core agenda for the December 2026 Summit in Miami: economic growth and deregulation, energy security, and AI and innovation. The broader 2026 U.S.-led G20 process reflects deliberate efforts to restrict the G20 agendas to priority economic issues. One implication of this is that the G20 engagement groups (formal and informal) are not explicitly engaged. The IF20 2026 program has reflected these distinctive process issues and the narrowing formal agenda, placing priority attention to the announced U.S. priorities; the F20 Policy Forum, held at Georgetown University on May 26, 2026, focused on these issues. However, analysis and dialogue on the broader historic agendas has continued, and were reflected in discussions at the May 27 workshop at Georgetown on a broader global agenda. This second workshop highlighted priority issues, set within the context of the SDGs, as an agreed global action agenda.

Faith and the SDGs: A Prophetic Call to Action

"Leave no one behind." This rallying cry, at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), finds resonances in the world's various religious, cultural, and philosophical traditions. The phrase's exact meaning is debated and its implications are complex, but it signifies an important global commitment to the well-being of people and planet, reflected in the 17 SDGs that the United Nations' 193 member states unanimously endorsed in 2015.

Over a decade after the goals were launched, the verdict is that results are disappointing. The SDGs' vital commitment to common efforts toward progress and equity is besieged, with over 80% of the goals' 169 targets reported to be off track. A tenth of the global population still experiences poverty, more than 2 billion people are moderately or severely food insecure, and progress has slowed across health indicators. These trends have some clear causes: the cascading crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, intensified interstate conflict, accelerating climate change, and declining development and aid spending have slowed or halted vital initiatives focused on achieving the SDGs, renewing pressure on the U.N. and other multilateral institutions.



The upshot is a highly uncertain future for specific policies and programs that are underway, as well as for the broader international development architecture. Fundamental reflections are called for, both to appreciate the causes of wavering commitment and to put forward creative and dynamic future plans for action. Challenges notwithstanding, the shared vision of the SDGs reflects a complex and longstanding international consensus and an important framework for dialogue and action.

In sum, the SDGs are worth striving toward, and religious communities are central to their ethos and practical implementation. With the deadline of 2030 approaching, this is the time both to learn from the past decade and to look to the future. As faith actors connect their on-the-ground experience with strategic planning to carry the SDGs' vision beyond 2030, policymakers from G20 countries can and should play a crucial role in bringing faith actors into decision-making processes and expanding the reach of existing faith-linked initiatives.

Religious communities and faith-linked organizations have been deeply involved in the development and implementation of the SDGs and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that preceded them. Faith actors participated in the extensive consultations that shaped the 2030 Agenda, and they support innumerable programs and projects that address specific goals, advocate for them in national and international forums, and voice concerns where

progress lags. The SDG framework complements prophetic visions of a better world that the world's major faith traditions share, and the 17 goals motivate and guide the work of many faith institutions and communities. Especially important are SDG goals 1 through 4 (no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education), which address the most urgent needs of billions of people and form the basis for achieving the other goals. Religious communities and organizations have worked toward these four goals in their communities for millennia, with contemporary efforts including feeding programs, health centers, and schools around the world. While the connection between religious actors and the SDGs is not always explicit, faith communities are integral to achieving the goals, not only through direct action and advocacy, but also in motivating their communities to support these efforts. Religious communities thus need to be at the center of both reflection and revitalization of commitment and action.

The roles and responsibilities of religious communities are not systematically documented and taken into account in meaningful, visible ways. For example, religious roles are rarely accounted for in measurements of progress on the SDGs at global or national levels. Acknowledging their contributions promises to paint a richer picture of the current situation. It can also work towards achieving more.

concrete and sustainable progress toward the goals. Now more than ever, religious communities and organizations with faith inspiration and links need to take on more engaged roles within strategic efforts to achieve the SDGs, going beyond surface-level engagement to shape approaches both *broadly* – speaking to contexts other than their own – and *deeply* – creating tangible change in communities.

This report highlights the work of faith and interfaith communities and organizations in advancing the SDGs and reflects on the value of religious voices in discussions about the future of the SDG framework. It poses the question: how can faith actors and communities inform renewed efforts to close the gaps in progress toward the SDGs, particularly in light of the shifting landscape of international development? What roles might they play in developing a post-2030 vision for sustainable development that carries on the imperative to "leave no one behind"? Focusing on goals 1, 2, 3 and 4, the report provides illustrative examples of recent work by religious communities, faith-linked organizations, and interfaith initiatives. Several short summaries highlight specific, interrelated issues of disaster preparedness and human trafficking, issues that have historically been of particular interest to IF20 networks. The report concludes with a discussion of pathways forward for religious actors and policymakers

The G20 Interfaith Forum: research and action

This discussion paper, produced for the 2026 G20 Interfaith Forum, belongs to a wider body of research focusing on the SDGs and the broader global development agenda. Since 2014, the IF20 had convened annually in the G20 host country to discuss, operating analogously to formal G20 engagement groups. IF20 publishes policy briefs focused on priority issues for each year's summit, including G20 host country priorities but also extending beyond these to issues of concern to faith-linked communities and the development work. These briefs connect to broader themes while also focusing on specific issues, drawing on insights from a wide array of religious communities in order to inform and assist G20 policymakers. This year, much of this research is focused on SDGs 1-4, but past topics of IF20 reports and policy briefs have included hunger, modern slavery and human trafficking, disaster prevention and response, protection of tropical rainforests, refugees and forced migration, anti-racism, and COVID-19.

This research sits within a broader framework of dialogue and research pursued by IF20 and related organizations throughout the year. IF20 hosts a series of webinars and podcasts on global policy issues and regularly publishes blog posts. IF20 also fosters connections to other organizations and initiatives at the intersection of faith and public policy, including the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs; the Georgetown-Lancet Commission on Faith, Trust, and Health; and the World Faiths Development Dialogue. A common goal of this research and programming is to approach complex and multi-faceted development issues through a faith lens in order to foster collaboration with G20 actors as well as among faith groups, civil society, and academic institutions, thereby embodying the IF20 approach as a "network of networks."

Interfaith Engagement for the SDGs: Focus on Goals 1, 2, 3 and 4

The first four SDGs focus on essential basic human needs. In all instances, religious communities have worked, implicitly or explicitly, to address these needs for millennia: ending the suffering of extreme poverty and hunger, promoting health and well-being, and educating children and young people. Today, some of the largest and most visible global faith-linked organizations have broad-based strategies and programs that tackle these issues, including the Aga Khan Foundation, Buddhist Global Relief, Catholic Relief Services, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Khalsa Aid, Latter-Day Saint Charities, Lutheran World Relief, Tzu Chi, World Vision International, and many more. At local levels, many houses of worship run community kitchens, schools, and initiatives that promote community health and well-being. Moreover, a significant proportion of hospitals, clinics, schools, and universities around the world were founded by faith organizations and continue to be shaped by a religious ethos.

Goal 1: No Poverty

Extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank as living below $3.00 (2021 PPP) a day, still affects one in ten people worldwide, with conflict zones and sub-Saharan Africa disproportionately affected. (The $3.00 poverty line remains contested by scholars; some argue that an outsize focus on extreme poverty distracts from relative poverty, which varies by context. Economist Lant Pritchett has called for the establishment of a global upper-bound poverty line that take into account national poverty lines and differences in cost of living.) Over half of the global population receives at least one form of social protection benefit, with countries spending an
average 19.3% of GDP on social protection in 2023. Yet major gaps persist: low-income countries spent only 2% of GDP on social protection, and only 9.7% of the population in low-income countries received some form of social protection benefit. Slow and uneven recovery from COVID-19, economic instability, climate-linked shocks, high national debts, and lagging economic growth makes it highly unlikely that extreme poverty will be eradicated by 2030. Moreover, it is estimated that only one in five countries will have halved their national poverty rate by 2030, one of the key targets of SDG 1. To realize the vision of a world without poverty, urgent action is needed to expand the social safety net and channel resources to the most economically marginalized communities.

Faith actors as the SDGs were selected, defined, and negotiated

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015 following a three-year planning process that involved the largest public consultation in U.N. history. It featured 88 national consultations, 11 thematic consultations on issues related to sustainable development, six dialogues on consultation, door-to-door surveys, and an online "My World" survey for members of the public to complete. Religious institutions and faith-linked organizations were invited to provide input in this consultation process, although they were not explicitly defined stakeholders. Consultations contributed to a draft framework, after which UN member states took primary responsibility in shaping the framework. Following negotiations among these states, the final version of the agreement was adopted by all 193 U.N. member nations.

The SDGs were designed to replace and expand upon the commitments reflected in the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000 to coordinate and advance global efforts to tackle extreme poverty, hunger, and deadly disease and to expand access to high-quality education. The SDGs pursued the MDG legacy and ideals while also foregrounding sustainability and expanding its vision to include all countries. The SDG framework does not explicitly mention faith or religious institutions; however, its emphasis on poverty alleviation, justice, and peace finds strong parallels in the world's major faith traditions, which emphasize serving the vulnerable and ensuring no one is left behind.

Religious congregations and faith-linked organizations are intimately involved in local and global efforts to combat poverty in its numerous forms. Churches, mosques, and temples are a port of first call in many communities, offering immediate help to those who cannot afford to meet their basic needs. Faith communities are also at the forefront of longer-term solutions to combatting poverty through efforts aimed at economic empowerment, including vocational skills training, sustainable agriculture, and microfinance and community-based financial models such as village savings and loan associations. Faith-linked advocacy efforts lobby for larger scale interventions and policy changes to lift people out of poverty, such as debt relief for the world's poorest economies.

Faith-based organizations advancing Goal 1

*In Pakistan, the **Akhuwat Foundation** runs local community development initiatives and provides interest-free loans to individuals, families, and communities.* Founded in 2001, Akhuwat draws on the Islamic principle of mawakhat (solidarity) to work toward a poverty-free Pakistan. Akhuwat Islamic Microfinance (AIM) provides interest-free loans to individuals and families in financial need; these loans go toward supporting small businesses, small-scale farmers, and house construction or repair. As of May 2026, AIM had 600,000 active loans, and its cumulative loans had benefitted over 3.7 million families in Pakistan. The Akhuwat Community Development Programme trains residents of rural and urban communities to identify local needs and implement development projects that reduce poverty and foster social cohesion. These projects support livelihoods and vocational training, as well as clean water access, food support, and local infrastructure.

***Catholic Relief Services** is present in the world's most vulnerable communities, running and supporting programs around the world to help lift people out of poverty and advocating for policies that address its roots causes.* In 2024, CRS's microfinance programs reached 3 million people across 45 countries. In northern Ghana, CRS sponsors a project to train farmers in climate-resilient agricultural practices, as well as providing access to water pumps to protect crops against drought; the project restored over 185,000 hectares of land, boosting livelihood as well as increasing food security and protecting the natural landscape. In El Salvador, a CRS project provides training in sustainable agriculture and entrepreneurship to young people, giving them the tools they need to make a living. Over 70,000 young people have obtained employment or self-employment through the project.

*In Ghana, the **Christian Rural Action Network** provides microfinance and skills training in rural communities.* Founded in 1993 by a group of academics and development professionals, CRAN focuses on alleviating poverty and improving quality of life for the rural and peri-urban poor and other vulnerable populations. Through its Micro-Enterprises Development Programme, CRAN facilitates rural communities' access to finance through microcredits, provides vocational skills training, and helps enhance access to technologies and markets for rural entrepreneurs and farmers.

***Islamic Relief Worldwide** supports projects that address poverty in over 35 countries, reaching nearly 27 million people in 2025.* In the Philippines, Islamic Relief provided grants to 1,000 small fishing and farming businesses, 200 of which were women-led, in the wake of Typhoon Odette; recipients established self-help groups to bolster their businesses' sustainability and create a financial safety net for members. A three-year project in Jordan equipped young Jordanians with skills to gain employment, while also providing cash assistance to nearly 100 Iraqi refugee families in Jordan.

***Lutheran World Relief** bolsters livelihoods and expands access to capital in poor communities around the world.* In Tanzania, LWF provides training for over 24,000 smallholder farmers in cultivating a key ingredient in mosquito repellents; the project has more than doubled farmers' income per acre between 2020 and 2023. In South Sudan, LWF supports a program for internally displaced people, primarily women, training them in fishery, poultry, and horticulture as well as assisting with finance, marketing and investment skills, and access to village savings and loan associations. Since 2020, over 10,000 people have received training.



*In Sri Lanka, the **Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement** runs numerous community development and poverty alleviation projects, with a presence in thousands of villages across the country.* Founded in 1958, Sarvodaya draws inspiration from Buddhist values and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, with a focus on fulfilling the basic needs of individuals and communities. Sarvodaya's approach to poverty reduction is holistic and multi-pronged; efforts include ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, building quality housing and infrastructure, providing community-based health care and education, boosting livelihoods, and promoting sustainable agriculture. Sarvodaya operates through its over 5,500 Sarvodaya

Shramadana Societies, village-level units that implement local projects addressing residents' needs. Sarvodaya Development Finance fosters sustainable development and empowers rural communities by providing financial services to non-bankable communities. Sarvodaya is present in 25 district centers and has benefitted over 15,000 villages.

Tearfund *supports interventions aimed at lifting economically marginalized communities out of poverty, with a focus on boosting incomes in gender-inclusive and environmentally sustainable ways.* Active in over 50 countries worldwide, Tearfund provides acute relief to people in humanitarian crises through cash and vouchers, helping people meet their basic needs during the crisis and providing cash to help people resume income-generating work. In sub-Saharan Africa, Tearfund has supported over 39,000 community-based self-help groups that have assisted nearly 800,000 people by providing low-interest. loans for small businesses, education, and health care. Tearfund also helps subsistence farmers generate more income by providing equipment, broadening access to markets, and improving adaptation and resilience to climate change.

World Vision International *provides livelihoods support for millions of the most marginalized people, particularly women and rural communities, to ensure that children have a strong start in life.* World Vision's livelihoods programming focuses on the poorest and most vulnerable communities around the world. Its THRIVE 2030 initiative has established over 100,000 Savings for Transformation groups across 11 countries, with the aim of lifting 10 million people out of poverty by 2030. Through its VisionFund, WVI provides microfinance to over 1.1 million borrowers, focusing on women and rural communities; VisionFund disbursed over $811 million in loans in 2025 alone and over $13 billion since 2003.

Faith-linked action on debt relief

The global debt crisis is a major obstacle to sustainable development in the world's poorest nations, with unsustainable debt burdens absorbing much-needed funding for public services such as health care and education. In 2024, developing countries spent $921 billion on interest payments, a 10% increase on spending from the previous year. That same year, 3.4 billion people lived in countries that spend more on servicing debts than on health or education. The G20 Common Framework, launched in 2020 to catalyze fair debt restructuring for low-income countries, remains slow and inefficient; attempts to reform the Framework have been largely ineffectual, sinking public and investor confidence and undermining growth.

Many faith-inspired advocacy efforts on debt relief are grounded in religious teachings and practices, such as restricting interest on loans and framing debt forgiveness as a moral matter. During the debt crisis of the 1990s, faith-based organizations came together to form Jubilee 2000, a coalition of campaigners in over 40 countries. Drawing on the biblical concept of a jubilee year and aligning with the Catholic Church's Great Jubilee of 2000, Jubilee 2000 helped secure the cancellation of over $100 billion in debt. Jubilee 2000 drew global attention to the moral component of the debt issue and placed debt relief onto the international development agenda. Today, organizations such as Jubilee USA Network continue the legacy of Jubilee 2000, advocating for further debt cancellation, fairer restructuring of debts, and reforms to the global financial system.

Jubilee USA Network, a coalition of over 600 organizations and faith communities, advocates for policies on the local, national, and international levels to ease the unsustainable debt burdens placed on low-income countries. Since its formation in 1997 as part of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, Jubilee USA has secured over $130 billion in debt relief for the world's poorest countries. In 2024, with the support of Pope Francis, Jubilee USA launched the Jubilee 2025 campaign in 160 countries. The campaign aims to achieve major reforms to the global debt financing system by 2030, including the cancellation and restructuring of unstainable debts shouldered by poor and climate-vulnerable nations. Jubilee USA Network also advocates for fairer lending practices, greater transparency and accountability in financial systems, anti-corruption measures, consumer financial protections, more equitable trade policies, and preventative measures to counter financial crisis and austerity.

Other faith-linked organizations are active on the debt issue, particularly in the UK, as 90% of loans from private lenders to low-income countries are governed by English law. **Christian Aid** has lobbied UK policymakers to pass the Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Bill, which would incentivize private creditors to renegotiate or cancel debts while strengthening debtor countries' legal protections. **CAFOD** also lobbies the British government for debt justice legislation and to place debt relief on the agenda for the 2027 G20 Summit in London.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

Progress toward eradicating hunger, tackling malnutrition, and preventing obesity has flagged in recent years. Over eight percent of the global population – between 638 and 720 million people – experienced hunger in 2024, and more than a quarter of the global population faced moderate or severe food insecurity. Women and children are especially vulnerable to malnutrition, with progress on child malnutrition slowing and even seeing signs of reversal. Nutrition and dietary diversity pose further challenges: in 2023, nearly a third of women aged 15-49 years were affected by anemia, with the same proportion unable to maintain minimum dietary diversity between 2019 and 2023. Food prices remain above pre-pandemic levels, posing an addition barrier to access quality, nutritious food for people around the world. Despite increasing public investment in agriculture, emergency food aid and development assistance for the agriculture sector have fallen in the wake of broad funding cuts to development assistance. Urgent, coordinated action is needed to achieve SDG 2, including strengthening global food systems, supporting small-scale farmers, bolstering childhood nutrition interventions, addressing the root causes of food price volatility, and ensuring channels for humanitarian food aid in conflict zones.

Feeding the hungry is a central tenet of each of the world's major religions, and rituals and traditions around sharing food are widespread. Faith-linked action to end hunger takes many forms, from running soup kitchens and child feeding programs to promoting sustainable agriculture and nutritious diets to advocating for policies that address food insecurity. Religious actors give voice to the moral imperative to feed the most vulnerable while also connecting the crisis of hunger to broader issues of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change. A report prepared for the 2025 IF20 in Cape Town shared case studies of faith-linked initiatives that combat hunger and advocate for better policy solutions; the report also highlighted religious teachings and institutional approaches to feeding the hungry.

*The **Akshaya Patra** Foundation provides free nutritious school lunches to millions of children in India.* Akshaya Patra, which means "pot full of food," was founded in in Bengaluru in 2000 by followers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Today, Akshaya Patra partners with the Indian government to implement the Mid-Day Meal Programme, providing hot lunch to more than two million children in 23,000 primary schools across the country. Akshaya Patra's extensive network of kitchens in India also provides immediate food relief following natural disasters.

***Bread for the World** advocates for far-reaching solutions to hunger in the U.S. and globally.* Bread for the World is an ecumenical Christian advocacy organization focused on promoting solutions to global hunger. Since 1974, Bread for the World has successfully lobbied for legislation that supports food insecure households and communities, both in the U.S. and around the world. Through its Bread Institute, Bread for the World supports nonpartisan research into root causes of hunger and malnutrition and puts forward policy solutions in its biennial hunger report.

***Buddhist Global Relief** provides food support to vulnerable groups, including orphans, schoolchildren, displaced people, hospital patients, and indigenous communities.* Since its founding in 2008, Buddhist Global Relief has sponsored over 30 projects aimed at alleviating hunger and promoting food sovereignty in 16 countries. Interventions include providing free lunches and after-school meals to children in preschool through secondary school, distributing emergency nutritional supplements to malnourished children under five, promoting urban gardens and farms in food insecure neighborhoods, distributing seeds, and training farmers in low-impact indigenous agricultural methods. Buddhist Global Relief partners with local organizations in implementing these projects.

***Farming God's Way** promotes sustainable, small-scale farming that aligns with biblical principles.* Pioneered in South Africa in the 1980s, Farming God's Way has been implemented by smallholder farmers in over 20 countries, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a non-hierarchical, grassroots movement run by volunteers with the aim of equipping the poor with the knowledge and tools to overcome food insecurity and poverty. Farming God's Way provides free instructional resources to farmers and runs training and mentoring sessions for farmers. Its approach focuses on specific agricultural methods meant to promote sustainability, minimize waste, and ensure biodiversity.

***Food Yoga International** serves over a million meals every day in more than 60 countries.* Food Yoga

International is a food relief organization with spiritual roots in ISKCON. The organization's flagship program is Food for Life, which serves free vegetarian and vegan food in 65 countries, including in conflict and disaster zones. Started in West Bengal in 1974, Food Yoga International served over 8 billion meals by 2024. The organization also publishes materials that advocate for better food policy.

MAZON: *A Jewish Response to Hunger advocates for systemic change to end hunger in the United States and abroad*. Founded in 1985, MAZON lobbies for legislative measures that address food insecurity in the U.S., including child nutrition programs, free and reduced-cost school meals, improvements to government food assistance, and support for at-risk groups. MAZON also raises awareness of hunger issues in local communities, providing educational materials and promoting local fundraising opportunities to a network of nearly 1,000 synagogues, as well as schools and community partners.

Pastoral da Criança *promotes healthy nutrition for pregnant women, infants, and young children*. Established in Brazil by a pediatrician and Catholic Bishop, Pastoral da Criança is a global movement focused on promoting the full development of the child, from conception to the age of six. Pastoral da Criança educates individuals and families in marginalized communities about proper nutrition for pregnant women, infants, and children and supports projects to bolster healthy diets, such as community gardens. Pastoral da Criança is active in 20 countries, primarily in Latin America and Lusophone Africa.



Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

After decades of promising advances, progress on global health targets is slowing. COVID-19 reversed key gains, cutting life expectancy by nearly two years and slowing progress on nearly all targets of goal 3. Both infectious and non-communicable diseases are major concerns, with malaria cases on the rise and tuberculosis once more the leading cause of death from a single infectious agent. In 2021, over half of global premature deaths (under 70) were from non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease, while risk factors (tobacco and alcohol use, air pollution, poor diet) went largely unaddressed. Despite an expansion in the global health workforce and access to health services, inequalities persist, with low-income countries and conflict zones facing the largest service gaps, personnel and equipment shortages, and funding shortfalls. Addressing these challenges requires an intensification of efforts and investments focused on bridging service gaps, strengthening primary care, building resilience in the health care system, and ensuring universal access to high-quality health care.

Religious and interfaith actors are involved in a wide range of health-related efforts, from running hospital and clinics to delivering community-based health interventions, expanding access to universal primary health care, focusing on maternal and child heath, promoting nutrition and healthy lifestyles, and educating the next generation of health professionals. Many international faith-inspired organizations have a health focus. There are also dozens of **national, regional, and global faith-linked religious health associations and networks** around the world, connected by shared religious values and a commitment to providing high-quality health care. Africa alone is home to more than 40 **Christian Health Associations** and church-based health networks, which manage significant sections of national public health systems, particularly in rural and underserved areas. While their scope and mission of these networks vary by context, they are generally involved in health care delivery, advocacy in policymaking forums, capacity building and continuing education for health care professionals, policy engagement with governments, mobilization of resources for humanitarian emergencies, and representation of faith-based providers in global health forums.

Religious roles in disaster prevention, preparedness, and response:

As climate change increases the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters and their long-term impacts, disaster prevention, preparedness, and response measures have become an urgent matter of policy. Disaster prevention and response is closely tied to multiple SDGs, including those on climate and environment, as well as goals 1-4; disasters increase poverty and hunger and threaten the health, livelihoods, and educational opportunities of millions.

Faith actors are on the frontlines of disaster prevention, preparedness, and response, leading community-level responses, mobilizing resources across borders, drawing international attention to the plight of those impacted by disasters, working alongside other actors, and cooperating across sectors. Their broad experience, tested skills, and vital insights have much to offer in enhancing broader efforts to mitigate and respond to disaster. The key challenge is to integrate faith voices into policy processes that prioritize the most vulnerable populations. In order to facilitate such integration, religious actors involved in disaster prevention, preparedness, and response should document these efforts to reflect the depth and breadth of their knowledge and experience and thereby create and strengthen pathways of cooperation.

Disaster prevention efforts led by faith-based actors focus on educating the public and lobbying governments on climate change issues. These projects reflect the long-term commitment that faith communities and organizations play in communities, building resilience before disaster strikes and reducing the risk of future disasters. Such efforts include: the **Anglican Church of Rwanda's Rural Development Inter-Diocesan Services** leading projects on climate-smart agriculture and solar energy infrastructure for homes; tree-planting campaigns by **EcoSikh** across India; the **Sisters Organizing and Advancing Recycling** run by Catholic Sisters in Ghana to encourage community recycling and environmental preservation; a **World Vision International** project in Tanzania that train stakeholders in disaster management; and an El Salvador-based project by **Lutheran World Relief** to educate farmers in soil and water conservation.

Disaster preparedness is another vital component of this process, one in which religious communities can and should play a larger role. All too often, faith voices are 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. A model for greater engagement is the U.S.'s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which has produced a guide for emergency managers to engage with faith-based organizations. FEMA also employs Voluntary Agency Liaisons who strengthen relationships between the government and faith and community groups. Faith-based organizations also provide resources on disaster preparedness to religious communities; **Episcopal Relief & Development**'s "Pastors and Disasters" toolkit helps Episcopalian and Anglican faith leaders prepare for disasters by outlining tools such as early warning systems, identifying evacuation centers, and establishing communication channels in advance.

Disaster response is a central way in which religious communities live out their faith's teachings to care for the most vulnerable. On the local level, faith institutions provide food, shelter, medical care, and other basic necessities to those impacted by disaster and help them to rebuild. Examples of such efforts abound. Recent initiatives include the **Community of Sant'Egidio** providing relief to communities affected by heavy flooding in Malawi and Mozambique in March 2026; **Islamic Relief Worldwide** supplying lifesaving food relief to communities affected by drought in the Horn of Africa in February 2026; **Khalsa Aid** providing emergency food parcels, hygiene kits, and clean drinking water to survivors of the 2025 Pakistan floods; and the **Tzu Chi Foundation** activating its disaster relief strategy within minutes of Taiwan's 2024 earthquake.



Faith-based organizations advancing Goal 3

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency *implements projects that promote an integrated approach to health*. As the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, ADRA runs projects focused on, health, education, livelihoods, and humanitarian aid in over 120 countries. ADRA trains community health workers, provides transportation for health facilities, promotes healthy lifestyles to combat non-communicable diseases, expands access to psychosocial support, bolsters early child development, and delivers essential medical services during health emergencies. ADRA also partners with governments and the private sector to strengthen quality, equity, and accessibility in health systems through data-driven decision-making. In 2024, ADRA ran over 170 health projects that reached more than 2.2 million people.

The ***Aga Khan Health Services,*** *an agency of the* ***Aga Khan Development Network,*** *is one of the most comprehensive private, not-for-profit health systems operating across Asia and Africa*. The AKDN's health model is notable for focusing on long-term institution building; it integrates ethical and community-oriented values with technical excellence, creating bridges between local service delivery and global health innovation. Working in countries such as Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Afghanistan, India, Syria, and parts of Central Asia, AKDN delivers an integrated continuum of care – ranging from community health and primary care clinics to secondary hospitals and tertiary teaching facilities – that serve millions of patients annually. Programs cover maternal and child health, infectious and noncommunicable diseases, nursing and medical education, and health systems strengthening. A defining feature of AKDN's approach is the combination of service delivery, training, and research, with institutions like Aga Khan University, producing health professionals and generating evidence to inform policy. The network also invests in quality improvement, accreditation, digital health, and public-private partnerships, aiming to set high standards that influence national systems.

The ***Community of Sant'Egidio*** *runs the DREAM project, providing high-quality health care to over 600,000 people in 10 countries, with a focus on HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, and chronic disease*. A lay Catholic movement best known for its peacebuilding work, Sant'Egidio launched DREAM in Mozambique in 2002. The project was motivated by *a desire to counter international skepticism regarding the feasibility of antiretroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS patients in low-resource African settings. With support from volunteer doctors from overseas, the project provided free treatment, molecular diagnostics, nutritional support, community accompaniment, and integration within national health systems. The focus has shifted in the years since, expanding to diagnose and treat chronic disease, provide epilepsy care, combat malnutrition, ensure food safety, and train medical professionals and strengthen health facility capacity, all while remaining on the front lines of the HIV/AIDS response. The program is especially well known for preventing mother-to-child transmission, reporting more than 150,000 HIV-free births among children born to HIV-positive mothers.*

The ***Christian Blind Mission*** *supports people with disabilities around the world, particularly in the most underserved communities*. Established in 1908 by a German Lutheran pastor to help blind children in the Middle East, CBM has since expanded to assist people with visual impairment and hearing loss, treat Neglected Tropical diseases, and provide physical rehabilitation services. CBM runs projects across Africa, Asia, and the Americas, where it also advocates for the inclusion of people with disabilities in health care, education, and livelihoods. CBM also lobbies for inclusive policymaking on issues such as disaster-risk reduction.

Christian Connections for International Health *brings together Christian individuals and organizations focused on promoting quality of and access to health care worldwide*. Founded in 1987, CCIH is a network with members representing more than 125 organizations and hundreds of individuals based in 190 countries. CCIH runs a number of initiatives for its members, focused on health systems strengthening, advocating for faith-based organizations in global health programming, mapping Christian health institutions around the world, promoting climate resilience measures, strengthening reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health, and providing capacity-building for member organizations.

The ***Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network*** *expands access to medicine and strengthens the quality of pharmaceutical services across Africa*. Founded in 1981 as an initiative of the World Council of Churches, EPN collaborates with 149 member organizations across 38 countries, predominantly in

Africa. EPN works to ensure that members have access to essential medicines, helps implement standard operating procedures and quality assurance systems, provides training and capacity building for health care workers, and helps connect member organizations with donors.

Every Pregnancy *works with over fifty Muslim organizations to provide science-based and culturally sensitive maternal health interventions in areas affected by conflict, discrimination, and climate change*. Launched in 2024 as the "For Mama" Ramadan fundraising campaign, Every Pregnancy supports medical facilities in over 20 countries (predominantly across the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa) by providing direct funding, sourcing medical equipment, and training health workers. Since its founding, Every Pregnancy's partners have supported over 70,000 safe deliveries, provided critical health services to more than 500,000 mothers and babies, trained nearly 800 health workers, and equipped over 40 health facilities.

IMA World Health *runs a range of health-related projects focused on disease treatment and prevention, maternal and child health, nutrition and WASH, mental health, and global health systems and security*. Founded in 1960 by a group of Protestant churches and church-linked organizations and now part of Corus International, IMA World Health projects are currently active in 10 countries in Africa, Asia, and Central America.

The ***Sovereign Military Order of Malta,*** *frequently referred to as the* ***Knights of Malta****, has a nearly thousand-history in health care work*. A lay Catholic order, the Knights combine a quasi-sovereign diplomatic status with extensive humanitarian and medical operations. With a presence in over 120 countries, the Knights provide a wide range of health services through its humanitarian relief agency, Malteser International, and national associations. These include emergency medical care, primary health services, hospitals, ambulance corps, and long-term care for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, migrants, and people with disabilities. The Knights' humanitarian work is especially prominent in crisis settings – supporting refugee health in the Middle East and Europe, running mobile clinics in sub-Saharan Africa, and delivering emergency relief following natural disasters – often in coordination with governments, UN agencies, and other NGOs.

The ***Tzu Chi Foundation*** *links clinical care with ethical practice through its medical missions and global outreach to underserved and disaster-affected settings*. Founded in Taiwan in 1966 by a Buddhist nun, Tzu Chi has evolved from a small local organization into a global organization with a permanent presence in nearly 70 countries, active in disaster relief, education, environmental, and health. Tzu Chi's health services include running hospitals and clinics, educating medical professionals, and operating one of the world's largest bone marrow donor registries. The Tzu Chi International Medical Association organizes volunteer positions for medical professionals to work in high-needs areas, including poor and disaster-impacted communities; as of 2022, the Association had over 14,000 members in 25 countries.



Goal 4: Quality Education

While school enrollment and completion rates have improved worldwide since 2015, progress across these targets has slowed in recent years, with over 270 million school-age children and youth out of school in 2023, representing a 3% increase from 2023. Quality of learning is another major concern: in 2019, only 58% of primary students globally achieved minimum proficiency in reading and 44% in mathematics; proficiency levels have declined among lower secondary students by 15% in reading and 10% in mathematics between 2018 and 2022. To counter these trends, countries must invest in policies that scale up free, compulsory, and quality education.

Religious institutions run schools and universities around the world, from the largest cities to the remotest villages. While exact numbers are difficult to determine, the number of religiously-affiliated educational institutions is likely in the hundreds of thousands. The Catholic Church alone runs over 230,000 schools (pre-primary to secondary) and over 1,300 universities. Throughout much of the Global South, these institutions were initially established to evangelize local populations and have since become a part of the religious fabric of their communities. Some of these schools are no longer run by religious authorities and teach secular curricula, while others are still faith-based. The broad range of these educational institutions makes it difficult to generalize about their role and impact; examples of educational networks illustrate both the diversity and shared values of these efforts.

Faith-based organizations advancing Goal 4

Aga Khan Education Services *runs schools and non-formal education centers in predominantly rural areas in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.* As part of the Aga Khan Development Network established by Aga Khan IV, AKES operates over 200 pre-primary to secondary schools, as well as more than 100 non-formal education centers, providing progressive, child-centered education that emphasize religious and cultural pluralism, equal educational opportunity for boys and girls, and service to the community. Nearly 90% of AKES schools are located in rural areas, providing high-quality education to underserved communities.

The ***Aga Khan Foundation's Madrasa Early Childhood Programme*** *provides community-based pre-primary education to tens of thousands of children in East Africa.* Started in 1984 in Mombasa to overcome barriers to early education among Muslim children, the Madrasa Early Childhood Programme provides quality, accessible, and culturally appropriate education in underserved rural and urban communities. The MECP curriculum integrates secular and Islamic education, ensuring that children who pass through the program are ready for primary school. The program also runs teacher training and supports curriculum development. As of 2024, MECP is active in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda; it reaches 10,000 children per year and has trained over 8,000 teachers in total.

The ***Bakhita Partnership for Education*** *supports Catholic education in sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on girls.* Launched in 2020 as a collaboration of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network, the BPE aims to improve access and quality of basic education. BPE partners with local chapters of the Jesuits and national associations of Catholic sisters who operate networks of schools in each partner country. As of 2025, the Partnership had strengthened education in dozens of schools in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The BPE also empowers its partners in advocating for holistic education and strengthening government education policy.

In Sri Lanka, ***Buddhist nuns known as bhikkhunis*** *provide formal and informal education and advocate for expanded access to education, especially for women and girls.* There are between 20 to 30 bhikkhuni-run primary and secondary schools in the country, mostly based out of bhikkhuni-led Buddhist temples. The schools provide free, full-time education aligned with the government-approved curriculum while also covering issues such as climate change, poverty, and gender inequality.

Catholic sisters *run pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools around the world, often in deprived communities.* Education is a primary focus of the world's 600,000 Catholic sisters, and many congregations have a special focus on girls' education. These include the Ursulines, School Sisters of Notre Dame, and Society of the Sacred Heart, which run schools all over the world.

Fe y Alegría *is a global movement dedicated to bottom-up education in poor and disenfranchised communities in 22 countries.* Established by a Jesuit priest in Venezuela in 1955 and now headquartered in Bogotá, Colombia, Fe y Alegría (Spanish for "faith and joy") is guided by the philosophy of popular education, which empowers marginalized communities to take control of their education, raise consciousness around social injustice, integrate victims of social exclusion into the education system, and act for transformative change. Fe y Alegría runs a broad network of schools across Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and southern Europe, as well as offering teacher training and adult education. Their model focuses on fostering listening, critical thinking, and intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and promoting diversity, justice, and democracy. Fe y Alegría is also a vocal advocate for the universal right to a quality education.

Faith-linked engagement against human trafficking

Trafficking is a symptom of the world's inability to effectively protect the poorest and most vulnerable people. Despite national and international commitments to end human trafficking, the scourge persists, exacerbated by the COVID-19 emergencies, economic crises, and forced migration. The fight to end human trafficking and modern slavery is deeply interwoven with the SDGs, including Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), as well as Goals 1-4, as victims of trafficking face poverty and hunger and typically lack access to health care and education. Addressing this issue is essential to protecting human rights, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable economic growth and individual economic opportunity around the world. Priority needs include broader public understanding of the topic, sharper legal frameworks, more robust and well-focused government spending, regulations that require and promote business transparency, sustained law enforcement efforts, proactive victim identification, and well-maintained support services to reintegrate victims into society.

Religious leaders and faith-linked groups play significant, multifaceted roles in responding to human trafficking: they lead prevention and intervention efforts, work directly with affected communities, and raise awareness of and shape attitudes to the issue. The teachings of many religious groups condemn human trafficking, and many local faith communities today support victims of trafficking. Recent years have also seen a rise in the number of international religious institutions and networks specifically dedicated to supporting victims, and prominent global religious leaders have been vocal on the issue. Faith-based efforts can reinforce and bolster active engagement with policymakers and dedicated organizations to promote dynamic integration.

Talitha Kum is an international network of Catholic women religious working against human trafficking. Launched by the International Union of Superiors General in 2009, Talitha Kum coordinates anti-trafficking efforts across multiple countries, offering training, raising awareness, and providing direct assistance to survivors through local, national, and regional networks. It focuses on prevention and protection for vulnerable groups, support and reintegration of survivors, awareness raising and advocacy, and systemic change to address the underlying causes of trafficking. In 2024, Talitha Kum-affiliated local and national groups existed in 89 countries, with over 6,000 people participated at the national level, including male and female religious as well as Christian laypeople and members of other faiths. Nearly 47,000 survivors of trafficking received direct support from Talitha Kum that year, and over 250,000 women and children were reached through protection and prevention programs.

The **Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities** is a collaborative effort among religious communities to address human trafficking as well as other issues. The alliance brings together faith-based organizations and leaders to leverage their moral influence to better protect children from trafficking through education, advocacy, and global partnership. Specific efforts include advocating for child dignity in online spaces, educating local leaders to recognize signs of trafficking, and addressing root causes. IAFSC emphasizes the importance of interfaith dialogue and collaboration in addressing human trafficking.

Buddhist organizations like the **International Network of Engaged Buddhists** and **Buddhism for Development** contribute to counter-trafficking efforts by raising awareness of the issue and addressing root causes such as poverty, migration, and lack of education. Dhamma Moli, a small Buddhist community in Nepal founded by two Theravada Buddhist nuns, provides shelter and education to young girls at risk of exploitation by human traffickers.



Faith actors and the SDGs

This report began with a central premise of the IF20 mandate – that religious and interfaith communities play essential roles in global governance platforms and institutions – and applied this lens to exploring faith-linked action on SDGs 1-4. This section explores questions about why faith-based actors and institutions are invaluable players in realizing these goals, and what sustained engagement with them might look like leading up to 2030 and beyond.

Why faith?

Faith leaders, representatives, and communities are strategically placed to promote and strengthen development efforts at the local level as well as contribute to national, regional, and global networks and collaborations. Better understanding their presence and roles in their communities, as well as how they may frame objectives and priorities in distinctive terms, can shape fruitful and innovative collaboration toward the SDGs and the post-2030 development agenda. This section highlights the strategic positions, skills, and insights religious actors and communities bring to their work.

The trust factor: Local faith leaders and representatives generally enjoy high levels of respect and trust from local people, particularly in the Global South. The reasons for this are numerous: moral authority derived from their religious roles, their steadfast commitment to leaving no one behind, and their embeddedness in the community, which makes people see them as being "in the same boat." This trust is invaluable for effective buy-in and implementation of development projects; it can take outside organizations decades to build trusting relationships that many religious bodies already enjoys from their communities. The trust faith communities enjoy also plays a role in shaping deep-seated attitudes on vital development issues, including vaccinations, education for girls, and climate change. In this moment, when the need for bold action is more urgent than ever and partnership and localization are non-negotiables, working with trusted partners is more important than ever.

The communication factor: The world's major religions all share in the SDGs' vision of a more just, equitable, and peaceful world, especially for the most vulnerable groups. Yet a major challenge of the SDG implementation process has been to effectively communicate the relevance of the goals and the impacts of SDG-linked projects on the ground in different contexts, which has in turn impeded buy-in and involvement from community members. Religious institutions can play a vital role in bridging perceived gaps between the vision of the goals and those of religiously and culturally-shaped understandings of human flourishing in local contexts. In this way, they can generate local interest in and commitment to achieving the goals, providing renewed energy in the home stretch to 2030 and in planning and implementing the next phase of the sustainable development agenda.



The mission factor: At a time when the development field has undergone substantial shocks, programs and budgets have been slashed, and the future is uncertain, religious institutions and local faith-linked groups have a long-term commitment to the betterment of their communities, shaped by a profound sense of mission. Governments and development actors can draw inspiration from this mission-oriented approach and, where possible, help bring projects implemented by local faith communities to scale. At the same time, religious communities can continue to draw on the concept of mission to hold governments to account, providing inspiration and motivation to renew efforts toward achieving the SDGs.

Faith and Development Beyond 2030

As 2030 draws closer, policymakers and development practitioners are in a critical position to shape the future of efforts to promote national and local development, building on the achievements of the MDGs and SDGs while accounting for the ways the world has changed over the past decades. Though the next set of development targets will look different, the SDGs will remain relevant well beyond 2030, not least of all because the values they reflect are still worth striving for.

Faith communities have invaluable roles to play, both in shaping the development agenda beyond 2030 and implementing it on local, regional, and global levels. Policymakers thus need to assure a seat at the table for faith actors in crafting the next development agenda. Religious actors need to use their numerous platforms to focus on the most urgent issues and vulnerable populations. This section offers proposals for what a post-2030 agenda might look like and roles that faith communities can play in shaping and implementing it, with the intention of catalyzing discussion at the upcoming G20 Interfaith Forums in the U.S., U.K., and beyond.



Consolidating, deepening, and integrating the goals: A common criticism of the SDGs concerns their breadth, which extends well beyond the original mandate of the UN to promote global peace, security, and international cooperation and to coordinate humanitarian action in crises. Moreover, some critics argue that the "checklist" approach of the SDGs fosters a fragmented approach to development and impedes more holistic ways of thinking. While the 17-goal framework has achieved unprecedented advances in the development sector, to the benefit of billions of people, a post-2030 framework should consolidate and deepen elements of the 17 goals, concretizing their interconnectedness and focusing on the issues of most pressing concern. Faith leaders can and should be a part of this reframing process, drawing on the teachings held in common by religious traditions - such as the golden rule, the interdependence of all living beings, and the moral obligation to care for the most vulnerable - to promote a more holistic understanding of well-being and human flourishing as the foundation of a post-2030 agenda.

Prioritizing localization: An oft-repeated criticism of the 2030 Agenda was that true local ownership and leadership in the implementation process has lagged. Despite rhetoric and commitments to localization, program implementation has, by some accounts, largely remained quite top-down and technocratic, focused more on priorities set by donor countries and institutions than on recipient communities, many of which may be quite weakly involved in making decisions on projects carried out locally. Going forward, policymakers need to ensure that local communities are involved at every stage of the process: in formulating targets for the post-2030 agenda, implementing projects, and monitoring and evaluating progress. Religious institutions and organizations can be invaluable allies in localization efforts: they are embedded in their local contexts and have longstanding relationships with local partners, especially in places where state mechanisms are weak or absent.



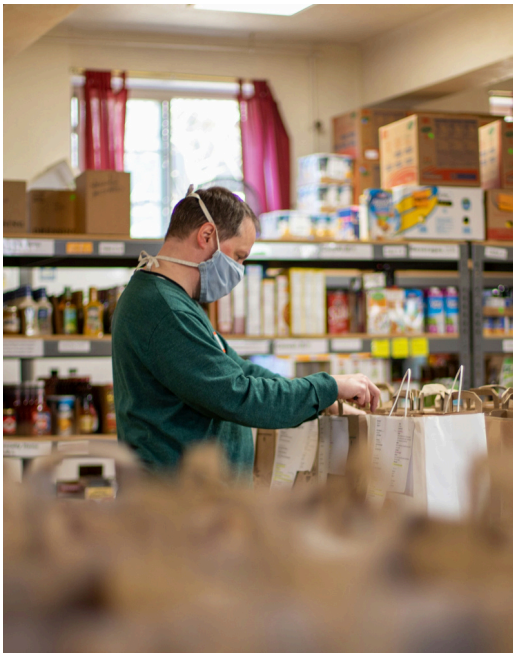
A renewed emphasis on peace and social cohesion: In a time of increasingly frequent and violent armed conflict, there is an urgent need to reassert the UN's mandate for peace. This also means promoting social cohesion, reestablishing trust between people and institutions, countering extremism, and democratic values. Faith communities already play a consequential role in peacebuilding efforts around the world – from mediating local conflicts to participating in formal peace talks – and they also promote reconciliation and dialogue in post-conflict settings. At the same time, in many instances faith is used to justify conflict and extremism. Drawing on their traditions' rich vocabularies of peace and fraternity, faith actors should use their moral authority to build bridges rather than sow division, participate in dialogue rather than enmity, and promote understanding rather than misinformation. Policymakers should include religious leaders and representatives in peacebuilding work as well as in efforts aimed at promoting democracy and cohesion.

Climate, environment, and biodiversity at the center of the development agenda: As climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation continue to worsen, the impacts can be felt in every area of development. Coordinated and comprehensive action on these issues should be at the heart of the post-2030 agenda, with clearly drawn connections to poverty, hunger, health care, education, livelihoods, and other key areas. Faith-linked organizations and local communities are among the loudest voices engaging with these multi-faceted issues, both in calling on decision-makers to change course and in implementing local solutions to climate-related challenges.

An elevated focus on ethical uses of technology: Artificial intelligence is becoming embedded into all aspects of life, including the development sector. A post-2030 development agenda should harness these technologies in scaling up effective interventions, such as AI-assisted medical screenings and teaching tools, but clear and robust ethical guidelines are essential. Religious actors can provide an invaluable moral voice on this moral issue, highlighting both the opportunities and limitations in the pursuit of the common good. In his papal encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, released in May 2026, Pope Leo XIV framed A.I. as a "valuable tool" when used toward the well-being of people, but he warned that humanity must never be replaced or surpassed by technology and that the dignity and rights of workers must be upheld.





























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