

WATER & FAITHS: FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE WATER SDGS

Integrating the contributions of Faith Based Organizations and of the Water Development Community to achieve the Water related Sustainable Development Goals

Water is at the core of sustainable development and is critical for socio-economic development, the preservation of healthy ecosystems, as well as for human well-being and survival itself. Water is at the heart of adaptation to climate change, serving as the crucial link between the climate system, human society, and the environment. Water is also critical for successful climate change mitigation, as many efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions depend on reliable access to water resources.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 in New York, recognize the central role of water with SDG 6 specifically focused on water, proposing to "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all." Water has also many links with other SDGs, and therefore has a considerable potential impact on all aspects of development.

SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- 6.1** By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
- 6.2** By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations
- 6.3** By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally
- 6.4** By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity
- 6.5** By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate
- 6.6** By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes
- 6.a** By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programs, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies
- 6.b** Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

Furthermore, the SDG framework clearly indicates the need to expand international cooperation as well as to support the participation of local communities in order to optimize the possibility of achieving the SDGs by 2030.



While, development is about policies and investments, it is also about behavior change and cultural values. In that respect, the role of Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) becomes crucial given their presence and influence in local communities.

It is therefore suggested to better explore ways of integrating the work of the Water Development Community (WDC) with the activities carried out by FBOs locally and globally.

The Central Role of Water

Water has profound symbolic meaning in many religious and local traditions. Water can symbolize life, liberation, purity and renewal. Conscious of the potential impact of climate change on future generations, faith and spiritual leaders have written a common Statement for the COP21 of the UNFCCC held in Paris in December 2015¹. It stipulates that it is our obligation to respect, protect and sustain the earth by all means. It further mentions that governments and political agreements alone are not sufficient for the immense challenges ahead – faith communities can provide solid grounding, moral support, ethical education and value-based sustainable development models which are needed for the global (and local) transformation process.

Our Shared Challenge

Aligning the objectives and approaches of the WDC and FBOs to support the achievement of the water related SDGs is not without challenges – but it is a challenge that we must actively engage given the considerable potential gains in building bridges between the WDC and FBOs at international, national and local levels.

SDG 17 stipulates the importance of strengthening the means of implementation and the need of revitalizing the global and local partnerships complemented by multi-stakeholder networks that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries, particularly developing countries.

FBOs often hold a foundational role in guiding community values, beliefs and behaviors. Because of their significant positions in society, FBO leaders can also have an influential role at political and social levels. Increased collaborative engagement of faith leaders in championing sustainable development can contribute to creating a conducive policy environment and increased political

¹ http://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/COP21_Statement_english2.pdf

commitment. Likewise, the WDC can support faith leaders in providing up to date information with real world applications for the benefit of their communities.

The role of FBOs is not yet sufficiently recognized as a major development partner, together with national and local governments, private sector, NGOs and international development agencies. Increased dialogue and cooperation is needed to better integrate the contributions of FBOs into development strategies to achieve the proposed SDGs in just 15 years.

What next?

As a first step in 2016, the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), and the Church of Sweden are convening a special session during the 2016 World Water Week, with a panel of invited representatives of different faith communities representing a broad range of traditions who are actively engaged in water related programs and projects in different geographical areas of the world. The gathered representatives will share their experiences and together with the conveners discuss and reflect on the role of faith based communities and faith leaders towards achieving water related SDGs, with the following main objectives:

- To support increased dialogue at the international level between FBOs and the WDC
- To document the existing role of FBOs in addressing global water challenges
- To mark a way forward for improved integration of the contributions of FBOs and the WDC to achieve the water related SDGs

For more information

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