



United Nations  
Convention to Combat  
Desertification



G20 GLOBAL  
LAND INITIATIVE

# Engaging Faith Groups on Land Restoration

## Stocktake Report



UNITED NATIONS DECADE ON  
ECOSYSTEM  
RESTORATION  
2021-2030

*This preliminary draft has been distributed to facilitate discussions at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).*

*The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations or its Member States.*

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Draft Report

# Executive Summary

This stocktake examines the potential of faith actors to contribute to the G20 Global Land Initiative's (G20 GLI) goal of reducing degraded land by 50% by 2040. The analysis draws from engagement with over 100 faith-led organizations through consultations, surveys, and expert dialogues throughout 2024. It examines how religious institutions can contribute to ecosystem restoration, revealing opportunities and challenges.

Faith institutions bring unique assets to ecosystem restoration, controlling 8% of global habitable land according to the World Resources Institute and possessing extensive educational networks. Their distinctive strengths include framing restoration as spiritual-environmental transformation, maintaining multi-generational commitments, and mobilizing communities through religious infrastructure like sacred lands and pilgrimage routes. But while 92% of surveyed faith organizations demonstrate strong commitment to restoration activities, two primary constraints limit their impact: funding mechanisms poorly aligned with faith-led operational models and insufficient access to technical expertise. Addressing these challenges could unlock significant potential for transforming conventional approaches to ecosystem restoration, particularly given faith groups' demonstrated ability to sustain long-term environmental commitments through their community networks.

The stocktake highlights emerging recommendations to scale faith-driven restoration, including:

- Establishing a Global Faith Restoration Fund with core trust, catalytic financing, and technical assistance windows
- Creating a Faith Restoration Technical Assistance Center
- Create comprehensive leadership development programs for both religious authorities and institutional decision-makers to advance restoration work

These recommendations aim to scale faith-led restoration while preserving the distinctive characteristics that make religious approaches effective - emphasizing inner transformation, long-term commitment, and deep community engagement. Success requires moving beyond viewing faith groups simply as implementation partners to recognizing them as knowledge holders and restoration leaders in their own right.

# Background

Land degradation stands alongside climate change and biodiversity loss as one of the greatest challenges to sustainable development. First identified as a critical concern during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the increasing pace and scale of land degradation now threaten food security, water availability, and community resilience worldwide. This crisis reflects not only physical environmental decline but also humanity's increasingly fractured relationship with the natural world.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) serves as the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. Through this framework, countries work together to address Desertification, Land Degradation, and Drought (DLDD) through coordinated action and shared commitments. Experience implementing these commitments has demonstrated that successful restoration requires addressing both the physical aspects of degraded environments and the cultural-spiritual connections that motivate long-term stewardship.

Recognizing the urgency for bold, coordinated action, the G20 Leaders launched the "Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats" in November 2020. The G20, representing 85% of global GDP and two-thirds of the world's population, set an ambitious target to achieve a 50% reduction in degraded land by 2040 on a voluntary basis. The G20 Global Land Initiative (G20 GLI) operates through four key pillars:

- Showcase success stories and recognize leadership
- Engage the private sector in sustainable land management
- Empower civil society and communities
- Build capacity between G20 members and non-member countries

The G20 GLI emphasizes that engaging with all stakeholders in land restoration efforts is crucial to promoting inclusivity and sustainability, as well as the ownership and empowerment of local communities. These stakeholders bring unique perspectives, knowledge, resources, and solutions while ensuring their needs and rights are respected throughout the restoration process.



Religious institutions and faith communities represent particularly significant stakeholders in global restoration efforts. Their extensive reach, moral authority, and deep community connections position them as potentially transformative partners in achieving the G20 GLI's ambitious goals. Faith communities bring distinctive strengths to restoration work through their emphasis on values-based approaches that can complement technical and economic strategies. These include:

- Multi-generational timeframes that align naturally with restoration cycles
- Emphasis on inner transformation that deepens commitment to stewardship
- Recognition of interconnections that encourages landscape-scale thinking
- Integration of spiritual and cultural values that strengthen community engagement

### ➤ **The Importance of Civil Society and Faith Groups**

Engaging civil society and faith communities is increasingly recognized as crucial for successful land restoration efforts. The G20 Global Land Initiative places particular emphasis on empowering civil society in land stewardship for sustainable development, recognizing that community-led approaches often achieve more durable outcomes. This includes creating platforms that bring together women, youth, and indigenous peoples to promote restoration and conservation efforts.

Faith communities play a unique role in restoration efforts through their ability to frame land restoration activities within broader spiritual and cultural narratives. As documented in the "Roots for Change: Using Values, Culture, and Spirituality to Restore Ecosystems" report (Center for Earth Ethics and UN Decade, 2023), religious institutions emphasize "inner restoration" - rebuilding human relationships with nature through values-based frameworks that sustain long-term ecological stewardship. This integration of spiritual practice with land restoration brings several key dimensions to existing global efforts:

- **Deep Time Perspective:** Religious institutions maintain multi-generational timeframes that align naturally with restoration cycles. Their established teaching systems and cultural frameworks enable patient, long-term engagement even when visible progress takes decades.
- **Integral Understanding:** Religious organizations effectively bridge different ways of knowing by combining spiritual teachings with science. This integration helps communities understand restoration as an extension of their spiritual practice while incorporating technical expertise in culturally resonant ways.

- **Contemplative Transformation:** Religious communities' emphasis on reflection and inner transformation cultivates deeper relationships with the rest of the natural world.
- **Community Mobilization:** Faith institutions leverage existing community structures and cultural authority to support sustained restoration engagement. Their regular gatherings and ceremonies create culturally appropriate spaces for restoration action.

While the global status of land restoration shows increasing awareness and commitment at international and national levels, the scale and pace of restoration efforts must accelerate substantially. Engaging faith communities, with their unique capabilities for sustained action and community mobilization, will be crucial for meeting ambitious targets and addressing the interconnected crises of land degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change.

#### ➤ **Purpose of the Faith Stocktake**

This Faith Stocktake serves as a critical step in mobilizing, strengthening, and scaling up restoration activities through faith actors worldwide. The term "faith actors" refers to faith-based organizations (FBO), groups affiliated with religious institutions, and civil society organizations that collaborate with or support faith communities in undertaking land restoration initiatives, the stocktake process aims to strengthen partnerships between faith communities and other stakeholders working to combat land degradation.

The findings and recommendations presented serves to also inform strategies for leveraging religious institutions' distinctive assets - from their emphasis on multi-generational commitment to their integration of spiritual and ecological values - in service of land restoration. This includes identifying how faith communities' values-based approaches can complement technical interventions while maintaining the cultural and spiritual dimensions that make their work effective.

When we restore ecosystems, we  
reclaim our ability to collaborate as  
Nature itself and revive our  
relationship with the ecosystems  
that we call home...





# G20 Global Land Initiative Objectives

## > OBJECTIVE 1

Conserving land and halting habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and land degradation, notably through sharing knowledge and best practices on conservation incentives, including strengthening physical and functional connectivity and quality of protected areas, enhancing land conservation, promoting sustainable land management practices, promoting active fire management, and implementing other policies and best practices to enhance land conservation and reduce land degradation.

## > OBJECTIVE 2

Promoting integrated, sustainable, and resilient land and landscape management through nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches; financing mechanisms; urban and rural land use planning; stronger implementation of international agreements and local environmental governance and laws; the empowerment of Indigenous peoples and local communities (including women, youth, and smallholders) in land management; secure land tenure, property, and land-use rights in accordance with the national legislation; as well as support for sustainable land and water management policies and sustainable agricultural practices, including traditional practices, in order to maintain and enhance ecosystem functionality.

## > OBJECTIVE 3

Restoring degraded land through sustainable and locally or regionally appropriate reforestation, afforestation, natural regeneration/ revegetation, restoration of ecosystem services, sustainable agricultural practices, and deployment of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches for biodiversity conservation, among other things, to restore ecosystem functionality in a landscape context. This objective will seek to prevent the transfer of degradation (i.e., avoid restoring one area to the detriment of another).

# Ambition

**To scale the transformative power of faith communities in contributing towards the global goals of restoring 350 million hectares by 2030 and achieving a 50 percent reduction in degraded land by 2040.**

Our ambition, guided by a profound recognition of our shared custodianship of the Earth, is to unite faith communities' moral and ethical care with science-driven restoration efforts. These efforts will be driven through transformative partnerships with the public, private, and civil sectors.

Together, we seek to strengthen the paradigm of faith-led restoration—one that not only restores land but is also based on values-based approaches that contribute to repairing and restoring our relationship to the Earth and how we live within it.



# Methodology

This stocktake examines the potential contributions of religious institutions and faith communities to global land restoration efforts through a comprehensive analytical approach combining three complementary research streams. The analysis specifically focuses on identifying scalable approaches that could support the G20 Global Land Initiative's target of achieving a 50% reduction in degraded land by 2040.

## ➤ Primary Research and Strategic Engagement

Throughout 2024, the research team engaged over 100 faith actors and restoration practitioners through structured consultations and strategic participation in key international forums. This included:

- A dedicated technical consultation in Bonn bringing together faith systems leaders and restoration experts to examine implementation models, barriers, and scaling opportunities. The consultation established working groups that maintained ongoing dialogue throughout the research process.
- Active participation in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity COP16 in Colombia, where targeted stakeholder meetings and side events provided insights into faith community engagement with global environmental frameworks.
- Strategic engagement during New York Climate Week, convening over 60 faith leaders and executives to examine alignment between religious action and the Rio Conventions.

## ➤ Comprehensive Survey

The research included a detailed survey reaching 50 organizations across 24 countries:

- Geographic distribution: Africa (42%), Americas (21%), Asia (17%), Europe (12%), Middle East (8%)
- Institutional composition: Faith-based organizations (45%), faith-affiliated NGOs (15%), religious institutions (10%), interfaith networks (8%), faith-connected academic institutions (12%), others (10%)
- Collective reach: Approximately 650 million people through combined networks

- Operational scale: International (15%), multi-country (20%), national (40%), local/regional (25%)
- Direct beneficiary engagement ranging from under 1,000 to over 100,000 people per organization

### ➤ **Desk Review and Analysis**

The research analyzed over 100 key reports from the faith and environment sector, representing a broad spectrum of global faith-led action and restoration initiatives. Drawing on existing knowledge from the field is critical to avoid duplicating research efforts and to build upon established insights. The reviewed reports represent diverse approaches to understanding faith-led environmental action - from quantitative impact assessments to qualitative case studies and theological analyses to practical implementation guides. The analysis encompassed:

- A comprehensive review of institutional reports and evaluations
- Documentation from faith-led restoration initiatives globally
- Technical submissions from religious institutions to environmental policy processes
- Case studies of successful faith-led restoration projects
- Guidance materials and toolkits developed for religious organizations

### ➤ **Multi-Level Perspectives Assessment Framework**

This analysis presents findings from an extensive desk review examining how faith-led initiatives drive transitions toward sustainable land management and restoration practices. Over 100 key reports from the faith and environment sector were reviewed, representing a broad spectrum of global faith-led action and restoration initiatives.

Drawing on existing knowledge from the field is critical to avoid duplicating research efforts and to build upon established insights. The reviewed reports represent diverse approaches to understanding faith-led action - from quantitative impact assessments to qualitative case studies and theological analyses to practical implementation guides. This review also acknowledges that different cultural and spiritual frameworks conceptualize human relationships with land in unique ways that may not directly align with conventional restoration concepts.



The analysis employs a Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) framework to examine how change happens across different scales of society. This approach helps us understand how ground-level innovations by faith communities can scale up to influence broader land management practices and how global trends create opportunities for religious institutions to deepen their environmental engagement.

**At its core, this framework examines three interconnected levels of change in society.**

- **The micro level** identifies innovative faith-led restoration projects - from monastery-led reforestation efforts to indigenous spiritual community conservation areas - that demonstrate new approaches to land stewardship. These ground-level innovations often serve as testing grounds for scaling up successful restoration practices.
- **The institutional level** examines where established practices in land management intersect with religious institutions and environmental networks. This includes how mainstream restoration practices integrate with religious land management traditions, how faith-led environmental networks coordinate restoration efforts, and how religious institutions engage with existing conservation frameworks.
- **The macro level** considers how broader environmental policies, climate impacts, and evolving interpretations of religious teachings create opportunities for faith actors in land restoration. This includes examining how international commitments like the G20 GLI's 50% degradation reduction target align with faith-led environmental action.

**This multi-level analysis helps identify several key pathways for change:**

- How can faith-led restoration projects at the micro level scale up to influence mainstream land management and restoration practices?
- How macro-level environmental trends and policies create new opportunities and pressures for faith organizations to engage more deeply in restoration work
- How religious communities are reinterpreting traditional teachings on environmental stewardship to actively support land restoration efforts
- How interfaith collaborations on restoration projects can reshape broader environmental dialogue and action
- The potential for faith-led restoration initiatives to inform and influence national and international environmental policies

## ➤ Limitations and Scope

While comprehensive, this analysis acknowledges certain methodological limitations. Traditional ecological knowledge maintained through oral traditions, ceremonies, and indigenous languages may not be fully captured through conventional assessment approaches. Additionally, the diverse ways faith communities conceptualize their relationship with land - whether as stewardship, guardianship, or sacred connection - may not align directly with standardized restoration frameworks. Future research should develop more inclusive methodologies for documenting these vital contributions.

The findings presented draw from this integrated analytical approach, offering insights into both current faith-led restoration efforts and pathways for strengthening religious institutions' contributions to global restoration goals.



Restoring ecosystems is akin to re-learning an ancient language; with each species returned and wetland regenerated, we become more fluent in the dialogue of life.





# The Landscape of Faith-led Restoration

Religious institutions represent some of the world's most significant landholders and resource managers, with institutional assets that could substantially advance global restoration efforts:

- Religious institutions own approximately 8% of habitable land globally (World Resources Institute, 2016)
- Faith-based organizations control over 5% of commercial forests worldwide (United Nations Environment Programme, 2019)
- Faith institutions manage roughly 10% of global financial investments that could be leveraged for restoration (Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2018)

This substantial capacity stands in marked contrast to current implementation scales, where most faith-led restoration initiatives operate at relatively modest sizes, with median projects covering 200 hectares. This analysis presents findings from extensive research examining how faith-led initiatives drive transitions toward sustainable land management and restoration practices, drawing from detailed case studies, stakeholder consultations, and comprehensive survey data to understand both the current state and future potential of faith-led contributions to the G20 Global Land Initiative's ambitious goal of reducing degraded land by 50% by 2040.

Faith communities have moved beyond traditional environmental stewardship to become increasingly strategic actors in landscape restoration. The desk review and consultative meetings revealed three distinct categories of faith-led restoration engagement emerging:

## ➤ Direct Implementation

Faith organizations are actively managing restoration projects on religious lands and in surrounding communities. These range from large-scale initiatives like the Sisters of



Loretto's 650-acre conservation easement in Kentucky, USA to networks of smaller urban projects like Sacred Grounds' native plant gardens at houses of worship. A key components is the integration of restoration activities with existing religious practices, exemplified by the Buddhist tree ordination ceremonies in Cambodia's Monk Community Forest.

### ➤ Knowledge Systems Integration

Faith groups are developing sophisticated approaches to combine traditional ecological knowledge, religious teachings, and modern restoration science. The Orthodox Academy of Crete's Museum of Cretan Herbs demonstrates how religious institutions can serve as repositories of biodiversity knowledge while connecting it to spiritual traditions. Similarly, the Bishnoi community in India is documenting its centuries-old environmental ethics to inform modern land restoration practices.

### ➤ Policy and Advocacy Leadership

Religious leaders are increasingly engaging in high-level policy processes, as evidenced by faith delegation participations across the Rio Conventions, coordinated by networks such as 'Faiths for Biodiversity' such as UNThis represents a maturation from general environmental advocacy to specific technical input on ecosystem restoration policies and frameworks.

## **Faith-Led Restoration: Survey Findings**

Building upon these three categories, a survey of 50 faith-led organizations engaged in land restoration activities across 24 countries reveals both the current scope and challenges of faith-led restoration efforts. The responding organizations collectively influence approximately 650 million people through their networks, representing about 8-10% of global faith adherents.

### ➤ The Reality: Current Engagement in Land Restoration

The survey revealed that 74% of organizations have active restoration programs, with another 16% in planning stages. However, only 28% have formal policies on land/ecosystem restoration, indicating a gap between practice and institutional frameworks. The majority (55%) implement multiple types of restoration activities, with tree planting (45%), soil conservation (35%), and water restoration (30%) being the most common approaches.

## **Resource and Capacity Needs**

The survey identified significant needs for both capacity building and financial support:

- 90% require capacity building assistance
- 92% need financial resources
- 84% specifically request technical training
- 82% require project implementation funding
- 76% need support for equipment and technology acquisition

## **Institutional Framework**

Only 24% of responding organizations are accredited with the UNCCD, suggesting substantial opportunity for increased formal engagement with international frameworks. Despite this, 56% report being ready for immediate scaling of their activities, though 30% indicate needing additional capacity first.

## **Organizational Maturity and Experience**

The survey reveals a faith sector in transition, with nearly half of organizations being relatively new to land restoration activities.

- 24% have over 10 years of experience
- 30% have been active for 5-10 years
- 46% have less than 5 years of experience

## **Implementation Status and Core Challenges**

The survey identifies systemic challenges across faith-led land restoration efforts. Resource constraints emerge as the fundamental barrier, affecting 92% of organizations, closely followed by human resource limitations (82%) and technical capacity gaps (76%). These foundational challenges suggest the need for comprehensive support systems rather than isolated interventions.

Resource and operational challenges highlighted included:

- Resource limitations: 92%
- Human resource constraints: 82%
- Technical capacity gaps: 76%
- Knowledge and expertise gaps: 46%
- Operational issues: 32%

The program focus of land restoration efforts currently include:

- Multiple restoration approaches: 55%
- Tree planting/forest restoration: 45%
- Soil conservation: 35%
- Water restoration: 30%
- Agricultural restoration: 25%
- Specialized ecosystems: 15%

### **Partnership Development and Collaboration**

Organizations demonstrate clear recognition of internal limitations and the value of external collaboration, with technical partnerships being the most sought-after (84%). Current partnership patterns show moderate engagement across sectors, with strongest connections to NGO networks (50%) but relatively low engagement with international organizations (24%). The partnership priorities were:

- Technical partnerships sought: 84%
- Financial partnerships desired: 72%
- Knowledge exchange needed: 68%
- Resource sharing interest: 62%
- Joint implementation sought: 56%

### **Scale and Community Impact**

Current activities range from small-scale community projects to large regional initiatives. The median project size of 200 hectares indicates most organizations operate at modest scales. Engagement shows meaningful but limited reach among respondents.

- Direct beneficiaries: 327,419
- Training participants: 42,000
- Jobs created: 1,850
- Active volunteers: 15,000+

### **Capacity Development Requirements**

The data reveals consistent gaps in organizational capacity across multiple dimensions. Most organizations require fundamental support in areas ranging from technical skills to knowledge management systems.

Technical needs identified:

- Restoration techniques: 84%
- Project management: 76%
- Scientific monitoring: 70%
- Financial management: 64%
- Leadership development: 56%

Knowledge Systems:

- Documentation systems: 72% lacking
- Monitoring frameworks: 68% needed
- Impact assessment: 62% required
- Knowledge sharing: 58% needed
- Communication support: 52% required

### **Technology Adoption Status**

Technology adoption remains limited, with most organizations only utilizing basic digital tools. The low adoption rates of specialized restoration technologies (12-24%) indicate significant room for technological capacity building.

- Mobile data collection: 32%
- Digital monitoring systems: 24%
- GIS/mapping tools: 16%
- Remote sensing: 12%

### **Growth Potential and Implementation Capacity**

The survey data indicates varied levels of readiness among faith-based organizations for scaling restoration activities. While 56% report being ready for immediate scaling, a significant 44% require additional capacity building or are still in planning phases - suggesting a need for phased, targeted support rather than immediate large-scale expansion. The scaling readiness indicated is:

- Ready for immediate scaling: 56%
- Requiring capacity building first: 30%
- In planning phase: 14%



## Resource and Capacity Constraints

The analysis reveals systemic challenges that need addressing before significant scaling can occur. The near-universal resource limitations (92%) and widespread technical capacity gaps (76%) indicate fundamental constraints that require systematic, long-term solutions:

- Financial limitations: 92%
- Human resource gaps: 82%
- Technical capacity: 76%
- Knowledge gaps: 46%
- Operational issues: 32%

## Partnership Development Status

Current partnership patterns show moderate engagement across sectors, with strongest connections to NGO networks. The relatively low levels of international organization links (24%) and private sector engagement (30%) indicate areas for potential development:

- NGO networks: 50%
- Government partnerships: 44%
- Academic collaboration: 36%
- Private sector engagement: 30%
- International organization links: 24%

These findings suggest that while faith actors have potential to contribute to restoration efforts, significant capacity building and resource support would be needed before even larger-scale impact could be achieved.

## Multi-Level Analysis

To further provide context to these findings, this report examines how ground-level innovations by faith communities are, and can further be, scaled up to influence broader land management practices and how global trends create opportunities for religious institutions to deepen their environmental engagement.

Land restoration is an act of reconciliation - between past and future, between human ambition and nature's wisdom, between what we've taken and what we must give back.



## Micro Level: Faith-led Innovation in Land Restoration

At the micro level, our analysis reveals a dynamic landscape of innovative faith-led restoration initiatives emerging across different religious traditions and geographic contexts. These ground-level innovations serve as vital testing grounds for new approaches to land stewardship that integrate spiritual values with ecological restoration.

### Key Innovation Patterns

Several distinct patterns of faith-led innovation in land restoration emerge from the reviewed reports:

#### ➤ **Community-Led Landscape Restoration**

Faith communities are pioneering participatory approaches to landscape restoration that emphasize local ownership and spiritual connection. For example, the Catholic Relief Services Madagascar project has restored over 7,413 hectares through a model that combines participatory mapping, multi-story agroforestry systems on church-owned land, and farmer cooperatives.

#### ➤ **Integration of Traditional and Sacred Knowledge**

Many successful initiatives deliberately integrate indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge with faith-led approaches. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has created thriving forest ecosystems surrounding 35,000 church locations by drawing on centuries-old traditions of sacred forest protection. Similarly, the revival of the Islamic "hima" system of conservation areas demonstrates how traditional religious land management practices can be adapted for modern restoration needs.

#### ➤ **Interfaith Collaboration Models**

Innovation is particularly evident in new models of interfaith collaboration. In Kenya's Maragoli Hills, 15 faith groups have committed to growing trees on at least 20 acres of their land, operating within existing structures of the grassroots interfaith council. This initiative has established a central tree nursery producing 20,000 seedlings annually while training faith leaders and school communities in sustainable tree-growing practices.

## ➤ Capacity Building and Education

A significant innovation trend centers on developing faith-sensitive approaches to environmental education and technical training. The World Vision Regreening Communities model, for instance, has trained over 30 faith leaders, 15 teachers, and numerous youth groups in sustainable tree-growing practices. These initiatives combine technical restoration skills creating culturally resonant training programs that achieve higher engagement rates than conventional approaches.



### Case Study: Sacred Site Integration and Transformation

- Adamah/Pearlstone Center
- Location: Baltimore region, United States
- Faith Tradition: Jewish
- Significance: Demonstrates successful integration of religious ritual practice with ecological restoration through innovative water management.

The initiative uniquely weaves together Jewish wisdom, nature connection, and community building through their Pearlstone Center's restoration work. By incorporating sacred mikvah pools within natural stream restoration, they've created a model where religious ritual enhances rather than interrupts ecological function. The project has restored 1,300 feet of stream, created a one-acre wet meadow ecosystem, and established three bioretention rain gardens with native species. Through collaboration with the Baltimore American Indian Center, they've developed innovative Jewish-Indigenous partnerships in restoring the Tëmakwehane (Beaver Creek) stream. Key outcomes include significantly increased soil carbon through regenerative practices and mobilization of \$1.5 million in restoration funding. The initiative demonstrates how religious practice can strengthen rather than hinder restoration when thoughtfully integrated with ecological science.



### Case Study: Agricultural Innovation and Community Restoration

- Sustainable Yogic Agriculture
- Location: India (with initiatives in Ghana, Australia, Mauritius, Italy, Brazil, Peru)
- Faith Tradition: Brahma Kumaris
- Significance: Pioneering integration of spiritual practices with regenerative agriculture for both ecological and economic benefits.

The initiative combines meditation practices with organic farming methods to restore degraded agricultural lands. Seeds are placed in meditation centers where practitioners focus thoughts of peace, non-violence, love, strength, and resilience on them for up to a month before sowing. This spiritual preparation is complemented by regular meditations in the fields and specific practices designed for each phase of the agricultural cycle. The approach has achieved remarkable results - reducing farming costs to 6,020 INR/acre compared to 26,740 INR/acre for chemical farming while maintaining higher profits at 64,068 INR/acre. Working in partnership with leading agricultural universities, they've engaged over 400 farmers across multiple regions, demonstrating improved soil health and seed germination rates through scientific validation.

### Success Factors

Analysis of the micro-level innovations documented in the reviewed reports reveals several distinctive patterns that contribute to successful faith-led restoration:

#### ➤ Integrating Restoration with Religious Practice

The most successful initiatives embed restoration activities within existing religious practices and spaces. For example, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's forest conservation succeeds by treating church forests as natural symbols of heaven on earth, making their protection an extension of religious devotion. Similarly, Indonesia's eco-pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) integrate tree planting and conservation into religious education, achieving 80% higher survival rates for planted trees compared to secular programs.

## ➤ **Strategic Partnerships**

While religious institutions possess extensive networks, their impact is significantly amplified through strategic partnerships between faith actors, NGOs, state agencies, and the private sector that can effectively leverage collective knowledge, skills, land, and resources. Technical organizations and NGOs play a vital bridging role in bringing faith-led organizations (FBOs) together in coordinated networks that maximize impact. In Kenya, for instance, a scoping assessment showed that between 2018-2021, faith actors, working in collaboration with other stakeholders, planted more than 10 million trees across different landscapes in the country - on faith land, community land, and state forest lands - accounting for more than 7,000 hectares brought under restoration. Building on this foundation, WWF has supported the formation of a national faith and restoration network that brings together more than 30 faith actors, who have pledged more than 8,000 hectares of their land for restoration. This coordinated approach, facilitated by technical partners, helps prevent duplication of efforts while creating platforms for collective action that leverage the unique strengths of both religious and secular institutions.

## ➤ **Livelihood Integration**

Initiatives that combine restoration with economic opportunities show significantly higher community engagement. The Catholic Relief Services Madagascar project demonstrates this clearly - their approach of establishing farmer cooperatives alongside restoration work has generated \$760,000 in sales while restoring 7,413 hectares, with a 95% community participation rate compared to 45% in projects without livelihood components.

## ➤ **Leveraging Religious Assets**

Successful projects strategically utilize existing religious infrastructure and resources. For example, WWF's Tanzania Ruvuma Landscape Project, a transboundary program implemented in collaboration with WWF Mozambique, leveraged church and mosque networks to identify faith-institutional lands for restoration. By utilizing existing community structures through these religious networks, the project demonstrated effective ways to scale restoration efforts through faith-led partnerships.

## ➤ Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge Integration

Projects that explicitly incorporate indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge alongside religious teachings show enhanced outcomes. The Xingu Seed Network's integration of indigenous spiritual practices with restoration techniques has built a network of 568 seed collectors across 19 municipalities, achieving native species diversity rates 3 times higher than conventional restoration approaches.

### Case Study: Contemplative Practice and Ecological Care

- Inayatiyya Earth Responders
- Location: North America and Oceania
- Faith Tradition: Sufi/Multi-faith
- Significance: Demonstrates how contemplative practices can enhance restoration outcomes through deeper participant engagement.

The initiative uniquely bridges inner and outer restoration through a three-part approach that systematically integrates spiritual practice with ecological care. Participants first engage in meditative practices focused on developing empathy and connection with nature. This is followed by technical training in native plant ecology and pollinator conservation from local experts like the Xerces Society. Finally, they implement restoration projects converting degraded spaces into native pollinator gardens. Their approach has successfully established demonstration pollinator gardens showcasing native species restoration while maintaining a contemplative approach to the work. The program demonstrates how combining spiritual practices with scientific expertise can enhance both community engagement and restoration outcomes, providing a replicable model for contemplative restoration work.

## Challenges and Barriers

The reviewed reports highlight several significant challenges that often constrain the potential of faith-led restoration innovations:

### ➤ Technical Capacity Gaps

While faith institutions possess extensive networks and moral authority, many lack specific technical expertise in restoration. The Faith Tree Growing Guide developed by

WWF, UNEP Faith for Earth, and Trillion Trees emerged in direct response to this challenge. Reports from Kenya's Maragoli Hills project note that even after initial training, 65% of faith leaders requested additional technical support for complex restoration tasks like species selection and soil management.

### ➤ **Resource Limitations**

Many faith institutions lack adequate financial and material resources for restoration. While faith communities often contribute significant volunteer labor, they struggle to fund crucial inputs like seedlings and tools. For example, in Tanzania's Ruvuma landscape, a one-year WWF pilot project initially aimed to restore 400 hectares through faith networks. While time constraints limited the initial restoration to approximately 200 hectares, the relationship-building process during implementation yielded an unexpected positive outcome - participating faith-led organizations identified and pledged an additional 4,000 hectares for future restoration work. This demonstrates both the resource challenges faith institutions face and their significant potential to scale up restoration efforts when provided with adequate support and partnership opportunities.

### ➤ **Institutional Coordination**

While interfaith collaboration shows great promise, coordination between multiple religious institutions requires thoughtful approach and planning. Experience varies significantly based on the type of work being undertaken. For advocacy-focused initiatives like the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative's work in Brazil, Colombia, and Indonesia, coordination can be more complex due to their engagement with multiple constituencies including Indigenous Peoples and their focus on policy-level change. In these cases, differences in organizational structures and decision-making processes may extend implementation timelines. However, interfaith collaboration on direct restoration activities often proves highly efficient, with multi-faith networks frequently achieving greater cost-effectiveness and implementation success.

### ➤ **Data Collection and Monitoring**

Reports consistently highlight challenges in systematically documenting the impacts of faith-led restoration. While faith groups are approximated to have planted over 300 million trees in the last decade, detailed monitoring data exists for less than 20% of these initiatives. This gap makes it difficult to verify long-term success rates and share best practices.

### Case Study: Scale and System Transformation

- Cauvery Calling
- Location: Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, India (46 districts)
- Faith Tradition: Hindu/Spiritual (Isha Foundation)
- Significance: Demonstrates how spiritual leadership can catalyze mass participation in restoration while maintaining implementation quality.

The initiative combines meditation practices with organic farming methods to restore degraded agricultural lands. Seeds are placed in meditation centers where practitioners focus thoughts of peace, non-violence, love, strength, and resilience on them for up to a month before sowing. This spiritual preparation is complemented by regular meditations in the fields and specific practices designed for each phase of the agricultural cycle. The approach has achieved remarkable results - reducing farming costs to 6,020 INR/acre compared to 26,740 INR/acre for chemical farming while maintaining higher profits at 64,068 INR/acre. Working in partnership with leading agricultural universities, they've engaged over 400 farmers across multiple regions, demonstrating improved soil health and seed germination rates through scientific validation.

### ➤ Institutional Level: Religious Systems and Restoration Practice

Faith-based institutions are transforming their approach to ecosystem restoration. They are developing sophisticated organizational structures that mark a significant departure from traditional charitable models. This emerging institutional architecture represents an increasingly more professional, systematic approach to land restoration.

Several key institutional patterns emerge from the reviewed research:

### ➤ Evolving Religious Environmental Networks

The past decade has seen the emergence of sophisticated interfaith environmental networks specifically focused on restoration. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI), launched in 2017 through collaboration between UN Environment, the World Bank, and major faith leaders, exemplifies this trend. IRI has established action coalitions in countries containing over 70% of the world's tropical forests, demonstrating how religious networks can operate at a significant scale.



### Case Study: Network Development and Coordination

- Faiths for Biodiversity
- Location: Global (with coordinated actions across multiple continents)
- Faith Tradition: Interfaith/Multi-faith
- Significance: Pioneering systematic coordination of faith engagement in international environmental policy.

Following the 2020 UN Biodiversity Summit, this initiative created the first international coalition specifically focused on mobilizing faith-based action for biodiversity. Key activities include establishing the first-ever Faith Hub in the Blue Zone at CBD COP15 and COP16, hosting over 20 official side events on topics ranging from tree growing to ecocide law. Their landmark publication "Uniting for Nature" (2024) represents the first comprehensive documentation of faith-based biodiversity initiatives across seven global regions. Success in coordinating 40+ faith-based organizations' participation at COP16 and securing formal meetings with CBD Executive Secretary demonstrates how religious institutions can effectively engage in environmental governance while maintaining spiritual authenticity.

#### ➤ Integration with Formal Conservation Systems

Faith institutions are increasingly finding ways to align their traditional land management practices with formal conservation frameworks. For example, Ethiopia's Orthodox Church has worked to integrate their ancient church forest system - which protects over 35,000 forest patches - with national conservation policies and international restoration commitments. This integration has allowed them to access new resources while maintaining their distinctive spiritual approach to forest protection.

#### ➤ Traditional Land Management Systems

Many faith institutions maintain traditional land management systems that are being revitalized for contemporary restoration. Beyond the more well-documented Islamic Hima system, lesser-known examples include the Japanese Shinto shinju-no-mori (shrine forests) network, which protects over 110,000 forest patches through traditional management systems. These shrine communities are now partnering with scientists to understand how their ancient management practices can inform modern urban forest restoration.

### Case Study: Technology and Knowledge Management

- GoodLands
- Location: Global, headquartered in New Haven, Connecticut, USA
- Faith Tradition: Roman Catholic
- Significance: Demonstrates sophisticated integration of modern technology with religious land stewardship.

This initiative pioneered integration of geographic information systems (GIS) with Catholic land stewardship principles, creating the first comprehensive mapping of Church properties since the Holy Roman Empire. Their spatial data infrastructure combines multiple approaches:

- Core mapping using ArcGIS Enterprise
  - Field data collection through Survey123
  - 3D modeling with CityEngine
  - Sustainable landscape design using GeoPlanner
- Key achievements include developing nearly 1,000 specialized maps for Church entities worldwide and securing Vatican approval to establish the first new scientific institution (Cartography Institute) since the Vatican Observatory. The initiative shows how religious institutions can embrace technological innovation while maintaining spiritual authenticity and achieving practical environmental impact.

### ➤ Institutional Financial Resources

Religious institutions are innovating in how they finance restoration work. The Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association's "Protecting the Green" program in Taiwan demonstrates an alternative approach, where they've created a restoration funding mechanism that blends traditional dana (religious giving) with environmental impact investments. This model has generated over \$15 million for restoration projects while providing a template for other Buddhist organizations globally.

## ➤ Policy Engagement and Advocacy

Religious institutions increasingly engage in environmental policy advocacy, often bringing distinct moral perspectives to policy discussions. For example, the Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute has developed a multi-faith framework for environmental advocacy that has successfully influenced land-use policies in five countries while maintaining religious authenticity.

## ➤ Faith-led Education Systems

Beyond individual projects, we see systematic efforts to integrate environmental stewardship into religious education. For instance, the Association of Buddhist Universities in Thailand has developed a standardized ecological curriculum that is now used by over 150 Buddhist educational institutions, combining traditional Buddhist principles with practical conservation training.

### Case Study: Traditional Land Management and Education

- Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
- Location: Global (with primary focus across five continents)
- Faith Tradition: Buddhist
- Significance: Demonstrates successful integration of spiritual principles, community development, and ecological restoration.

The Foundation's "Co-Exist with Earth" program uniquely combines Buddhist teachings on universal compassion with practical environmental action. Their approach in the Jiawan tribal area exemplifies how religious institutions can support indigenous-led conservation while building community resilience. Key achievements include establishing a network of 9,000 environmental action centers, engaging 90,000+ volunteers in ecological restoration, and developing innovative disaster prevention systems. The initiative particularly focuses on engaging youth in farming and restoration activities to ensure long-term sustainability, while establishing woodworking workshops that support both livelihood creation and restoration work. Their success demonstrates how religious institutions can effectively combine spiritual teaching, technical training, and community development.

## Challenges and Barriers

The reviewed research highlights several significant institutional-level challenges that affect faith-led restoration efforts:

### ➤ **Limited Technical Infrastructure**

Many religious institutions lack the technical infrastructure needed to implement restoration at scale. While they may have strong community networks and moral authority, they often struggle with basics like GIS mapping, monitoring systems, and technical documentation. The Orthodox church forests in Ethiopia exemplify this challenge - despite protecting some of the country's most biodiverse forest fragments, many lack basic forest inventory and monitoring systems.

### ➤ **Governance Complexity**

Religious institutions often have complex governance structures that can slow decision-making around land use and restoration. The Benedictine experience in land stewardship highlights this challenge - while their monasteries control significant land holdings across Europe, decisions about restoration projects must navigate multiple levels of religious authority, from local abbots to Vatican oversight. This complexity can delay or deter restoration initiatives.

### ➤ **Resource Distribution**

While religious institutions collectively control substantial resources, these resources are unevenly distributed. Many grassroots religious communities, particularly in regions most needing restoration, lack access to adequate funding and technical support. The Buddhist Economics Research Platform's analysis reveals that while some Asian monasteries have significant resources for environmental projects, many rural temples struggle to fund basic conservation activities.

### ➤ **Institutional Resistance**

Some religious institutions face internal resistance to prioritizing environmental restoration. This resistance often stems from competing priorities, theological disagreements, or concerns about diverting resources from traditional religious activities. For example, some conservative seminaries actively resist including environmental stewardship in religious training, viewing it as diluting their core mission.

## ➤ The Recognition Gap

One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of formal mechanisms to acknowledge and account for faith-based contributions to national and global restoration targets. While these organizations often achieve significant environmental impacts, their work frequently goes uncaptured by conventional metrics. There is an urgent need to develop appropriate indicators and reporting frameworks to effectively measure both quantitative and qualitative outcomes of faith-based restoration projects.

### Case Study: Rights-Based Approaches and Justice

- Land Justice Futures
  - Location: United States (primarily Northeast and Midwest)
  - Faith Tradition: Interfaith (primarily working with Catholic communities)
- Significance: Demonstrates transformation of religious land management through justice-centered approaches.

Land Justice Futures helps religious communities reimagine their relationship with land through a unique three-part approach: protecting land from extraction, regenerating ecosystem health, and expanding land equity to historically dispossessed communities. Their intensive Focus Communities program provides two-year accompaniment to 16 religious communities, helping them develop "land justice property plans" that center both racial and ecological healing.

Key innovations include:

- Supporting Indigenous women's restoration of ancestral waters through kelp farming that filters 20x more CO2 than forests
- Creating alternative financing models that enable equitable land transitions
- Developing comprehensive educational resources including a five-part Land Justice Futures Course The project demonstrates how religious institutions can address both historical injustices and environmental degradation through thoughtful land stewardship.



## Macro Level: Policy and Society

These institutional challenges and opportunities do not exist in isolation - they are shaped by broader societal forces and trends. This brings us to our analysis of the macro level, where we examine how larger environmental, social, and policy contexts influence faith-led restoration efforts. The reviewed reports reveal several critical macro-level factors shaping faith-led restoration initiatives:

### ➤ **Global Environmental Policy Framework**

Faith-led restoration efforts increasingly operate within a complex web of international environmental commitments. The G20 Global Land Initiative's ambitious target of reducing degraded land by 50% by 2040 provides a key framework. This aligns with other major commitments like the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), the Global Biodiversity Framework's 30x30 target, and various climate agreements. These frameworks create both opportunities and challenges for faith-led actors as they navigate multiple, sometimes competing, policy demands.

### ➤ **Alignment with Global Frameworks**

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) has emerged as a key organizing framework for faith-based restoration efforts, particularly its Target 2, calling for 30% of degraded areas to be under effective restoration by 2030. Faith organizations are increasingly aligning their work with these specific, measurable targets while bringing distinct value through their moral authority, community networks, and long-term presence in landscapes.

The G20 Global Land Initiative's ambition of 50% reduction in degraded land by 2040 provides another crucial framework that faith actors are engaging with. Religious institutions are uniquely positioned to support this target through their extensive landholdings and ability to mobilize community action. However, consultation participants noted that better mechanisms are needed to track and account for faith-based contributions to these global targets.

### ➤ **Integration Across the Rio Conventions**

Faith actors increasingly recognize the interconnected nature of climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. This has led to more approaches that:

- Address multiple environmental challenges simultaneously through integrated restoration projects
- Leverage religious networks to advance coordinated action across the Rio Conventions
- Connect local restoration efforts to global environmental governance processes
- Build capacity among faith leaders to engage effectively with technical aspects of all three conventions

However, the consultations revealed that many faith organizations still need help to navigate the complex institutional architecture of the Rio Conventions effectively.

### Case Study: Urban Sacred Sites and Demographic Change

- Netzero.sa
- Location: Makkah, Saudi Arabia
- Faith Tradition: Islam
- Significance: Demonstrates successful integration of digital technology with sacred site restoration in urban contexts.

Led by NetZero, an independent Saudi organization, and operating under the Saudi Ministry of Environment's Sidra Initiative, this project uniquely combines smart technology with community engagement to expand vegetation cover in Makkah's holy sites. Netzero's innovative digital platform allows users to plant a tree in just one minute, while their Digital Tree Wallet creates emotional connections by enabling users to name trees and track environmental benefits. The "Tree for Each Pilgrim" initiative creates lasting environmental legacies by connecting pilgrims to individual trees. Key achievements include:

- Planting 5,000 urban trees in Makkah's holy sites
- Achieving 950 tons of CO2 reduction annually
- Reducing tree planting costs by 60% through shared economy model
- Creating first digital tree-planting platform in Gulf region The project demonstrates how sacred sites can serve as centers of environmental innovation while maintaining spiritual significance.

## ➤ Climate Crisis, Land Degradation, and Biodiversity Loss

The interconnected challenges of climate change, land degradation, and biodiversity loss are driving increased engagement from religious institutions. According to UNCCD estimates, land degradation directly affects over 3.2 billion people globally, with agriculture expansion driving 90% of global deforestation. These existential challenges are prompting many faith communities to reexamine their relationship with the land and their role in environmental protection. This is evident in regions experiencing severe climate impacts and desertification, such as Africa's Sahel region, where religious institutions are engaging in immediate disaster response and longer-term restoration efforts. The issue of desertification has become especially significant for faith communities in dryland regions, where traditional religious practices often have deep connections to sustainable land management. For example, Muslim communities across North Africa are reviving traditional Islamic water management and land care practices in response to advancing desertification. Similarly, Indigenous spiritual communities in Australia's arid regions are combining traditional fire management with modern conservation techniques to combat land degradation.

### Case Study: Coastal Restoration and Community Adaptation

- Case Study: Waterspirit
- Location: New Jersey, USA
- Faith Tradition: Catholic (Sponsored by Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace)
- Significance: Demonstrates integration of spiritual ecology with practical conservation in coastal urban areas.

The initiative uniquely integrates spiritual ecology with practical conservation work, focusing specifically on green infrastructure and native plant restoration in coastal areas. Working through their coastal facility, they implement restoration projects that rebuild natural water flows and habitat connectivity in densely populated regions. Their approach addresses both physical and social dimensions of ecosystem degradation by implementing green infrastructure projects with native plants and establishing monitoring programs along coastal sites, while building partnerships with local government agencies and creating a women-led model that emphasizes long-term stewardship and engages multiple stakeholders from educators to business leaders, demonstrating how religious institutions can effectively bridge urban-rural divides while maintaining spiritual connections to water bodies.

### ➤ **Shifting Societal Values**

There is an increasing shift in how societies view the relationship between religion and environmental action. While environmental concerns were once seen as separate from or even antagonistic to religious missions, faith communities are growing recognized as legitimate and necessary actors in ecosystem restoration. This shift is particularly pronounced among younger generations of religious adherents, who increasingly view environmental stewardship as central to religious practice.

### ➤ **Economic Transitions**

The global push toward sustainable economies is creating new opportunities for faith-led restoration initiatives. Mechanisms such as carbon markets, biodiversity credits, and other ecosystem service payment schemes are beginning to provide new funding streams for religious institutions engaged in restoration. However, these market mechanisms also raise theological and ethical questions for some faith communities about the commodification of nature and present an opportunity to develop alternative financing mechanisms for the new economy that are rooted in sacred values of stewardship, prioritize collective wellbeing over profit maximization, and restore balance in both human and ecological relationships. Faith communities can demonstrate how finance can serve restoration and regeneration while respecting the inherent dignity and value of creation.

### ➤ **Technological Change**

Emerging technologies are reshaping how faith-led restoration can be implemented and monitored. Satellite monitoring, mobile apps, and digital platforms are making it easier for religious institutions to participate in restoration efforts and demonstrate their impact. However, access to these technologies remains uneven, potentially widening the gap between well-resourced and under-resourced faith communities.

### ➤ **Youth Mobilization and Demographic Shifts**

Urbanization and changing demographics are affecting how faith communities engage with land restoration. As populations become increasingly urban, many religious institutions are adapting their approach to environmental stewardship - from maintaining urban green spaces to developing new forms of connection with rural restoration sites.

Youth engagement has emerged as a critical factor in scaling faith-based restoration efforts. The consultations revealed an evolution from token youth participation toward genuine youth leadership in restoration planning and implementation. The Youth Negotiators Academy's work exemplifies this shift, demonstrating how young people can effectively bridge religious and environmental movements while bringing new perspectives to restoration efforts.

### ➤ **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities**

Faith organizations are fundamentally reimagining their relationships with Indigenous peoples and local communities in restoration contexts. Moving beyond historical tensions, innovative partnership models are emerging that emphasize Indigenous leadership and knowledge systems. The Monk Community Forest in Cambodia demonstrates how religious institutions can effectively support Indigenous-led conservation while respecting traditional governance systems.

The consultations highlighted the importance of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a foundational principle for faith-based restoration efforts. Religious organizations are increasingly recognizing that effective restoration requires not just consultation but genuine partnership with Indigenous communities. This shift has practical implications for project design, implementation, and monitoring.

A key challenge remains in reconciling different worldviews and knowledge systems while maintaining authentic religious perspectives. The "Reweaving the Ecological Mat" project in the Pacific demonstrates how faith organizations can integrate Indigenous and religious perspectives in ways that strengthen rather than diminish both traditions.

### ➤ **Urban-Rural Integration**

The traditional divide between urban religious institutions and rural restoration needs is being bridged through innovative approaches. Faith organizations are developing integrated strategies that connect urban congregations with rural restoration projects while also advancing urban restoration initiatives. The Balsall Heath Nature Map project demonstrates how faith communities can reimagine urban spaces through an ecological lens while maintaining religious meaning and significance.



The consultations highlighted a growing recognition that effective restoration requires attention to both urban and rural contexts, with faith organizations uniquely positioned to bridge this divide through their networks and institutional presence in both settings.

### **Case Study: International Policy and Partnership Development**

- **Case Study:** Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI)
- **Location:** Global, with focus programs in Brazil, Colombia, DRC, Indonesia, and Peru **Faith Tradition:** Interfaith/Multi-faith
- **Significance:** Demonstrates sophisticated engagement with complex environmental governance.

The IRI uniquely positions religious leaders and faith communities as powerful advocates for forest protection, bridging scientific expertise, indigenous knowledge, and religious values. Key achievements include:

- Securing endorsement of Faiths for Forests Declaration from 900+ religious leaders representing over 1 billion followers
- Creating comprehensive educational toolkit for religious leaders
- Establishing active country programs in five major rainforest nations
- Facilitating groundbreaking collaborations between religious leaders and Indigenous peoples
- Building coalition of 75+ faith-based organizations working on rainforest protection
- Developing new funding mechanisms connecting faith institutions with forest conservation The project shows how religious institutions can effectively engage in complex environmental governance while maintaining spiritual authenticity.

### **Implications of Macro Trends**

#### **➤ Policy Integration Opportunities**

The alignment of multiple global frameworks - from the G20 GLI to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration - creates unprecedented opportunities for faith-led actors to integrate their work with broader restoration movements. However, research indicates that many religious institutions lack the capacity to effectively engage with these

complex policy frameworks, potentially missing opportunities for support and collaboration.

### ➤ **Changing Power Dynamics**

Environmental crises are shifting traditional power dynamics between religious and secular institutions. As faith communities demonstrate success in restoration efforts, they are increasingly being recognized as partners by governments and international organizations. The lead-up to COP28 in the UAE demonstrated this evolving dynamic, with unprecedented engagement between religious and climate leadership. Pope Francis's meetings with COP28 President Dr. Sultan Al Jaber highlighted the growing recognition of religious leaders as key voices in environmental policy. This was further exemplified by COP28's historic inclusion of the first-ever Faith Pavilion and the UAE's hosting of a global faith leaders' summit addressing climate action, which included strong calls for ecosystem restoration.

These high-level engagements reflect a broader shift in how religious institutions are viewed within environmental governance. Faith communities are increasingly moving from peripheral participants to partners in climate and nature initiatives, as evidenced by the growing number of faith-inclusive environmental policy consultations. This shift recognizes both the moral authority of religious institutions and their practical capacity to mobilize communities for action.

### ➤ **"Faith Washing" and Authenticity Concerns**

A concerning trend reported by institutions is the risk of "faith washing," - where corporations or governments superficially engage with religious institutions to legitimize environmental initiatives without meaningful commitment to faith values or restoration outcomes. As religious institutions gain prominence in environmental governance, there is a concern about their potential instrumentalization.

This challenge extends to restoration initiatives, where religious institutions must navigate partnerships that respect their spiritual and ethical frameworks while accessing needed resources and support. Reports indicate some religious organizations have declined high-value restoration projects when they felt spiritual values were being marginalized in favor of quantitative metrics alone. This suggests the need for careful attention to maintaining authentic faith-led approaches while scaling up restoration work.

### ➤ **Knowledge System Integration**

The interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation are catalyzing new dialogues between different knowledge systems. Traditional religious teachings about land stewardship are being reexamined and often validated by scientific findings about ecosystem health. Yet this integration goes beyond simple validation. Reports show the most successful restoration initiatives actively create space for multiple ways of knowing. For example, the Philippine Eagle conservation project demonstrates how combining indigenous Bagobo Tagabawa spiritual traditions with modern conservation science achieved both better ecological outcomes and stronger community engagement than previous science-only approaches. This convergence suggests the need to move beyond treating religious knowledge as merely supplementary to scientific approaches, instead recognizing how different knowledge systems can mutually enhance restoration efforts when given equal respect and space for dialogue.

### ➤ **Resource Mobilization Challenges**

While new funding mechanisms are emerging, the scale of resources needed for global restoration far exceeds current availability. Reports estimate that achieving global restoration targets will require trillions of dollars in investment, presenting both an opportunity and challenge for faith communities to mobilize their financial and social capital.

### ➤ **Intergenerational Dynamics**

The reports present a complex picture of intergenerational dynamics in faith-led restoration. While youth engagement is significant, it manifests differently across religious and cultural contexts. World Vision's analysis of faith-led restoration projects in East Africa shows how young people often serve as bridges between traditional religious land management practices and new restoration techniques. For example, their documentation of Tanzania's eco-mosque initiative reveals how young Islamic leaders successfully integrated traditional Islamic environmental teachings with modern agroforestry practices, gaining support from both elder religious authorities and youth groups.

However, intergenerational dynamics extend beyond simple youth advocacy. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative's work shows how effective restoration projects often depend on carefully negotiated relationships between religious elders who hold traditional ecological knowledge and younger members who bring new technical skills and environmental perspectives. This suggests the need for approaches that foster constructive intergenerational dialogue rather than assuming universal youth-led momentum for change.

### **Case Study: Technical Partnerships and Scaling**

- **WWF's Beliefs & Values Programme**
- **Location:** Global (with focus programs in East Africa, Asia, and Latin America)
- **Faith Tradition:** Multi-faith Significance: Demonstrates successful model for faith-conservation partnerships at scale.

WWF's Beliefs & Values Programme (BVP) was established in 2019 to support WWF's engagement with faith actors, as its traditional conservation approaches were missing opportunities for collaboration with faiths on shared goals. A 2021 scoping assessment in Kenya revealed that faith actors were actively engaging in restoration initiatives, particularly tree planting, but without access to scientific expertise needed for high survival rates or integration with broader landscape restoration strategies.

The BVP pioneered a systematic approach to faith-based conservation by creating dedicated platforms for faith-conservation collaboration. At the international level, the program facilitates faith participation in environmental policy forums while developing resources specifically designed for religious audiences through their Faith & Nature Hub. On the ground, the program builds multi-faith networks focused on practical restoration work. Key outcomes include:

- Established the Faith & Nature Hub as a global knowledge platform
- Developed faith-friendly tree growing guides combining spiritual and scientific metrics
- Built networks engaging 30 faith organizations representing 3 million people
- Facilitated restoration of 8,000 hectares of faith-owned lands in Kenya
- Supported 8 faith & restoration networks in Kenya and Tanzania

The programme demonstrates that technical resources must be specifically designed for faith audiences, trust-building requires long-term commitment, and faith networks function best with independence while accessing scientific support.

## ➤ Toward Systemic Approaches

The analysis of micro, institutional, and macro patterns reveals the increasing sophistication and transformative potential of faith-led restoration efforts. Case studies also demonstrate how religious institutions are evolving their approaches while maintaining spiritual authenticity, particularly through five key developments:

1. Faith actors are transitioning from traditional charitable environmental work toward rights-based approaches that center Indigenous peoples' leadership and traditional knowledge systems. This evolution recognizes the imperative to address historical injustices while building effective restoration partnerships that honor local wisdom and sovereignty.
2. Religious organizations are developing enhanced technical capacity in ecosystem restoration. Projects like the Islamic Help Children's Eco Village in Tanzania exemplify this advancement, incorporating sophisticated permaculture principles and micro-conservation zones while maintaining cultural and spiritual relevance.
3. Faith groups are pioneering innovative financing mechanisms that extend beyond conventional philanthropy. The emergence of specialized Islamic finance instruments for restoration projects demonstrates this growing financial sophistication.
4. Faith communities are actively creating platforms for youth leadership in restoration planning and implementation, recognizing that effective ecosystem restoration requires sustained intergenerational engagement.
5. Faith actors are increasingly working to bridge the urban-rural divide in restoration efforts. Initiatives like the Balsall Heath Nature Map in Birmingham, UK demonstrate how urban faith communities can effectively engage in nature conservation while building connections to broader rural restoration efforts.

Success in scaling these approaches will require continued attention to both technical excellence and spiritual integrity, supported by appropriate enabling frameworks and partnerships.

While faith-led restoration has clearly evolved beyond isolated projects toward systematic approaches that can contribute significantly to global restoration goals, realizing this potential will require sustained investment in building religious institutional capacity while respecting the unique characteristics of faith-led approaches to environmental stewardship.



The Midrash teaches,

“If not for trees, human life  
could not exist..”









# The Path Forward

The stocktake process has revealed both the immense potential and current constraints of faith-led contributions to global land restoration efforts. Through their extensive educational networks, moral authority, assets, and generational presence in communities, faith actors demonstrate distinctive approaches to restoration that integrate spiritual values with environmental action.

However, realizing this potential requires addressing significant gaps in technical capacity, access to resources, and institutional coordination. The survey findings indicate that while 92% of faith organizations express strong commitment to restoration work, they face consistent challenges in accessing funding, technical expertise, and supportive policy frameworks. At the same time, the case studies documented throughout this report demonstrate innovative solutions emerging from faith communities - from integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern restoration techniques to developing new models for community engagement and long-term stewardship.

The path forward must, therefore, balance multiple imperatives: accelerating restoration action while respecting distinctive spiritual approaches, building technical capacity while preserving cultural wisdom, and scaling impact while maintaining authentic community connections. This requires moving beyond viewing faith groups simply as implementation partners to recognizing them as knowledge holders and restoration leaders in their own right.

Drawing from extensive consultations, surveys, and analyses conducted throughout 2024, this section outlines the principles and concrete actions needed to strengthen and scale faith-led contributions toward local and global land restoration efforts.



# Cross-Cutting Principles

The stocktake process identified ten fundamental principles that should provide concrete guidance for strengthening faith-led contributions to restoration while preserving the distinctive characteristics that make religious approaches effective. They should inform program design, policy development, and resource allocation at all levels.

## › Inner and Outer Restoration

Faith communities bring unique depth through their emphasis on inner transformation alongside physical landscape restoration. This approach creates more durable outcomes by addressing the root causes of degradation while rebuilding sacred connections to the land. It requires respecting how different traditions conceptualize this inner-outer relationship.

## › Multi-Generational Vision and Action

Religious institutions demonstrate distinctive long-term commitment through established community presence and intergenerational teaching systems. Their temporal frameworks enable patient, 'deep-time' engagement beyond typical project timeframes, ensuring restoration efforts can mature and adapt over generations.

## › Knowledge Systems Integration

Effective faith-led restoration bridges multiple ways of knowing while maintaining spiritual authenticity. This requires specific mechanisms for integrating scientific expertise with religious knowledge and traditional ecological understanding. Success depends on treating faith communities as knowledge holders rather than just implementation partners.

## › Rights-Based and Inclusive Approaches

Faith-led restoration must prioritize marginalized voices while creating broad participation pathways. This includes protecting indigenous rights, ensuring women's leadership, engaging youth, and addressing all structural barriers to participation. Religious institutions have unique capabilities to advance justice through restoration.

## › Asset and Infrastructure Based Implementation

Religious institutions command vast physical assets beyond land holdings, including pilgrimage routes, sacred groves, educational facilities, and community centers. These networks of sacred infrastructure can anchor landscape-scale restoration while serving as demonstration sites and learning centers. Success requires mapping and mobilizing these diverse assets while respecting their spiritual significance.

›

➤ **Collaborative Governance and Partnership**

Faith-led restoration needs governance models that protect religious autonomy while enabling effective partnerships. This includes mechanisms for interfaith coordination, technical collaboration, and engagement with policy frameworks while maintaining clear faith leadership in decision-making.

➤ **Financial Innovation and Sustainability**

Resource mobilization must align with religious principles while creating accessible funding. This requires developing non-debt and non-usury-based instruments that work within faith traditions' ethical frameworks while meeting finance standards and enabling both small and large-scale initiatives.

➤ **Technical Excellence with Spiritual Authenticity**

Faith-led restoration must achieve high technical standards without compromising spiritual integrity. This requires specialized capacity building designed for religious contexts and monitoring systems that capture both tangible and intangible outcomes.

➤ **Community-Scale Impact and Mobilization**

Religious institutions excel at sustained community engagement through established structures and moral authority. Faith communities can achieve scale through existing religious networks while maintaining local authenticity. Their deep local presence and trusted leadership enable unique capabilities for grassroots action and long-term land stewardship.



# Transition Pathways: Land Restoration through Faith Communities and Networks

The multi-level analysis of consultations, surveys, and implementation experiences reveals several critical pathways through which faith actors, religious communities and networks can contribute meaningfully to the G20 Global Land Initiative's goal of reducing degraded land by 50% by 2040. These pathways leverage existing institutional strengths while creating new opportunities for scaled impact across different time horizons.

## ➤ **Scaling Local Innovation for Systemic Change**

Experience from successful restoration initiatives demonstrates that religious institutions can effectively mobilize community-level action for land restoration when properly supported. Local religious communities often maintain deep connections to their landscapes and possess sophisticated traditional ecological knowledge developed over generations. When these communities receive appropriate technical and financial resources, they can implement restoration approaches that combine traditional stewardship practices with modern conservation science.

The analysis reveals that successful scaling requires careful attention to local context and community ownership. Rather than imposing standardized models, restoration approaches should be adapted to work within existing community structures and decision-making processes. Religious institutions can serve as important bridges between technical experts and local communities, helping translate restoration principles into culturally resonant practices.

## ➤ **Financial Innovation**

Faith institutions control substantial resources that could support restoration, including land holdings, investments, educational facilities, and social networks. Notable examples like the Islamic Development Bank's \$1 billion climate finance commitment demonstrate the potential scale. Financing approaches include:

- Faith-aligned green bonds and sukuk
- Religious investment screening with restoration criteria
- Integration of restoration into traditional religious giving
- Interfaith funding pools and Public-Commons Partnerships

## ➤ **Building Technical Capacity and Knowledge Exchange**

A critical finding from the consultations is the need for enhanced technical capacity within religious institutions to implement restoration at scale. While these institutions often control significant land resources and maintain strong community networks, they frequently lack access to current restoration science and methodologies. Success stories demonstrate how religious institutions can effectively combine their community influence with technical restoration expertise when given appropriate support. The analysis suggests several priority areas for capacity building:

- **Restoration Planning and Implementation:** Religious institutional leaders and community members require training in core restoration principles, site assessment, species selection, and monitoring protocols. This technical knowledge should be delivered through culturally appropriate frameworks that respect existing governance structures.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Many religious institutions need support in accessing and managing restoration finance, developing project proposals, and establishing sustainable funding mechanisms. Training in project management and financial administration can help institutions access larger-scale restoration funding.
- **Documentation and Knowledge Management:** Enhanced capacity for systematic documentation of restoration outcomes enables religious institutions to build evidence bases for their approaches while contributing to broader learning about effective restoration strategies.

## ➤ **Closing the Restoration Readiness Gap**

Faith communities demonstrate a strong willingness to engage in restoration but often face a "restoration readiness gap." The successful integration of religious institutions into restoration efforts requires appropriate institutional frameworks and support mechanisms. The analysis identifies several key elements:

- **Technical Support Networks:** A consistent finding is the importance of connecting religious institutions to technical expertise and resources. Regional support hubs can provide ongoing guidance while facilitating knowledge exchange between communities. These hubs should be designed to complement existing faith community infrastructures, religious educational and administrative structures.

- **Sustainable Financing Mechanisms:** Religious institutions require access to diverse funding sources that can support long-term restoration work. This includes developing faith-compatible investment vehicles, creating revenue-generating restoration models, and establishing connections to environmental finance mechanisms. Regional technical hubs would help faith groups move from initial concepts to restoration-ready projects that meet funders' requirements.
- **Policy and Regulatory Frameworks:** Clear policies and regulations help religious institutions engage effectively in restoration while protecting their autonomy in implementation. This includes frameworks for land tenure, project approval processes, and benefit-sharing arrangements.

### ➤ **Implementation Pathways Across Time Horizons**

The analysis suggests a phased approach is required to accelerating faith-led land restoration efforts over the next 15 years that recognizes both the urgency of restoration action and the need for sustained engagement to achieve lasting impact.

#### **Near-term Actions (2024-2025)**

Initial focus should be on strengthening foundations while capitalizing on current momentum. Priority actions include:

- Developing standardized approaches for documenting restoration outcomes within religious institutions
- Disseminating existing multilingual technical resources adapted for religious community contexts
- Establishing regional training programs aligned with existing religious educational structures
- Building networks between faith institutions and restoration technical experts

#### **Medium-term Development (2026-2030)**

This period requires intensified action and systematic scaling of successful approaches through:

- Integration of restoration goals into institutional governance structures
- Development of sustainable financing mechanisms and market linkages
- Creation of permanent knowledge-sharing mechanisms
- Establishment of demonstration sites showcasing successful restoration approaches

## **Long-term Transformation (2031-2040)**

Focus shifts to achieving systemic change aligned with the G20 GLI's 2040 target through:

- Full integration of restoration principles into faith institution operations
- Development of self-sustaining restoration financing mechanisms
- Establishment of permanent institutional structures supporting restoration
- Creation of lasting partnerships between religious and technical organizations

### **> Opportunity Areas for G20 GLI Implementation**

The G20 Global Land Initiative operates through four fundamental pillars of action. Each pillar offers specific opportunities for engaging faith actors and religious institutions in land restoration efforts:

#### **> Showcase Activities - Building Awareness and Recognition**

The GLI maintains comprehensive platforms for sharing restoration knowledge and success stories globally. Within this framework, restoration initiatives led by religious communities can be documented and shared, providing practical examples of effective implementation approaches and measurable outcomes. For instance, successful watershed restoration projects by temple communities or forest conservation efforts by monastery networks can inspire similar actions elsewhere. The GLI's global awards program also provides opportunities to recognize outstanding restoration leadership from religious institutions.

#### **> Private Sector Engagement - Mobilizing Resources**

Through their extensive networks and trusted community positions, religious institutions can serve as important bridges between restoration initiatives and private sector resources. The GLI provides guidance on restoration finance and supports innovative funding mechanisms that can be adapted for projects implemented through religious institutions. Additionally, the GLI's ecopreneur program can provide support to restoration enterprises and green businesses emerging from faith actors and religious communities.

### ➤ **Civil Society Empowerment - Strengthening Community Action**

Religious institutions maintain extensive grassroots networks that can significantly advance restoration goals through community mobilization and advocacy. The GLI supports citizen science initiatives for monitoring land degradation and restoration progress, which can be strengthened through religious community participation. Faith-led institutions can also contribute their community organizing expertise to practical restoration efforts through programs like the GLI's Ecosystem Restoration Camps.

### ➤ **Capacity Building - Developing Technical Expertise**

The GLI maintains a comprehensive framework for building restoration capabilities across stakeholder groups. Religious institutions can benefit from and contribute to the Global Research and Academic Network on Land Restoration, facilitating knowledge exchange between religious communities and technical experts. The GLI's work with universities and forestry institutes on curriculum development can incorporate content specifically relevant to religious institution land managers. Additionally, religious leaders can strengthen their restoration advocacy and implementation capabilities through participation in the GLI's Global Leadership Programme.

### ➤ **Looking Forward: Catalyzing Systemic Change**

Through strategic engagement with religious institutions within its existing operational framework, the G20 GLI can help unlock significant additional restoration capacity. To achieve the G20 GLI's ambitious 2040 restoration targets, religious institutions must be effectively integrated into broader restoration efforts while maintaining their distinctive strengths in community mobilization and long-term stewardship. Success will require:

- **Systematic Documentation and Learning:** Building comprehensive evidence bases for restoration approaches that work effectively through religious institutions while maintaining scientific rigor in monitoring and evaluation.
- **Enhanced Technical Support Systems:** Developing permanent support mechanisms that can provide religious institutions with access to current restoration science and methodologies while respecting their organizational autonomy.



- **Sustainable Resource Mobilization:** Creating diverse funding mechanisms that can support long-term restoration work through religious institutions while ensuring appropriate financial management and accountability.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships :** Establishing lasting partnerships between religious institutions and other restoration stakeholders, including government agencies, technical organizations, and private sector actors.
- **Youth and Next Generation Leadership:** Faith institutions can play a vital role in engaging young people in restoration work, creating pathways for sustained, gender inclusive, engagement through education programs, practical restoration activities, and leadership development.
- **Rights-Based Approaches and IPLC Engagement:** Ensuring restoration efforts respect and strengthen the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, including their traditional knowledge, customary land rights, and sacred natural sites. This requires meaningful consultation processes, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and protocols for engagement that recognize both religious and indigenous spiritual connections to land.
- **Gender-Responsive Leadership and Implementation:** Promote gender equality and women's empowerment in restoration governance and implementation. This requires restoration initiatives to address gender-differentiated needs and opportunities while advancing women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes, particularly in contexts where traditional religious leadership structures may be male-dominated.



# Stakeholder Recommendations for Scaling Faith-led Ecosystem Restoration

Through extensive stakeholder consultations, surveys, and analysis, a clear consensus emerged on the actions needed to effectively engage religious institutions and networks in achieving land restoration goals. The findings draw from diverse participants across sectors - including government agencies, private sector entities, multilateral organizations, civil society groups, and religious institutions themselves. Their collective insights reveal how the broader restoration field can better support and amplify restoration work through religious networks while respecting their unique institutional characteristics and community connections.

The recommendations outline specific interventions suggested to realize the full potential of religious institutions in advancing restoration objectives. They address critical gaps in technical capacity, funding mechanisms, institutional frameworks, and partnership approaches identified through the consultation process. These recommendations are intended to guide action by the full spectrum of restoration stakeholders - from policymakers and funders to implementing organizations and technical partners.

## ➤ **Establish a Global Faith Restoration Funding Mechanism**

The proposed funding mechanism, to be operational by 2026, would catalyze and coordinate financial support for faith-led land restoration initiatives globally through a three-tiered architecture: a resource mobilization platform, a matchmaking facility connecting projects to funders, and a technical assistance component to ensure implementation quality.

The mechanism should function as an international collaborative platform, streamlining access to multiple funding streams including blended finance instruments, private sector investments, and traditional philanthropic sources. This structure enables efficient resource coordination while maintaining strong religious representation in its operational framework alongside international financial standards. Key design elements would include:

- Project preparation support to develop bankable initiatives
- Standardized metrics combining faith-based and technical criteria

- Technical assistance matched to religious institutions' capacities
- Advisory board with balanced religious and financial expertise
- Integration with existing restoration finance platforms
- Focus on scaling proven approaches to landscape level

The mechanism aims to strengthen the ecosystem of faith-led restoration by reducing transaction costs, building capacity for financial management, and fostering partnerships between religious institutions, conservation organizations, and financial partners while preserving the distinctive spiritual characteristics of faith-based approaches. This coordinated yet flexible approach would help successful pilot projects access diverse funding sources for scaling.

#### ➤ **Pilot Innovative Funding Mechanisms**

Develop and test new financial instruments that align with religious values and post-growth economics. This includes restoration-linked religious giving programs, faith-led green bonds, reciprocity-based exchange systems, and community wealth building approaches that support long-term stewardship.

#### ➤ **Establish a Faith Restoration Technical Assistance Center**

Create a dedicated support mechanism specializing in faith-sensitive approaches to soil restoration, water conservation, agroforestry, and indigenous land management practices. The center should be governed by a multi-faith steering committee and maintain regional hubs for localized support.

#### ➤ **Create a Sacred Land Restoration Program**

Launch a dedicated initiative focused on restoring degraded religious lands, sacred natural sites, and pilgrimage routes. This should include mapping religious land assets, developing restoration plans, and creating corridors connecting sacred sites.

#### ➤ **Develop Faith-led Restoration Monitoring Framework**

Create monitoring systems specifically designed for faith contexts that track soil health, biodiversity, water systems, and carbon sequestration alongside spiritual and social indicators. This should include creating systems for documenting successful faith-led restoration approaches, traditional ecological knowledge, and emerging innovations. Include practical tools, case studies, and teaching materials designed for religious contexts.

#### ➤ **Launch a Faith Restoration Leadership Program for Religious Leaders**

Implement specialized training for religious authorities (priests, nuns, imams, monks,

rabbis etc.), focusing on integrating restoration into religious practice and teaching. Program should include practical restoration knowledge, theological frameworks for environmental stewardship, and tools for mobilizing congregations. It should reach out to leaders through a partnership with seminaries, religious training institutions, and restoration networks.

➤ **Create a Faith Institution Executive Restoration Training**

Establish a dedicated capacity-building program for executives and managers of religious institutions (church administrators, mosque trustees, temple boards, etc.) who control land assets and make operational decisions. It should include training and modules on land assessment, restoration planning, monitoring systems, and sustainable financing. The program should build practical skills for transforming religious lands into restoration showcases while maintaining their spiritual function.

➤ **Establish a Faith Restoration Academy**

Create a specialized learning and leadership program to amplify historically marginalized voices in faith-led restoration across all lines of distinction. The Academy should combine on-the-ground restoration work with spiritual practice and knowledge exchange. The Academy should elevate multiple ways of knowing - bringing together scientific, spiritual, and traditional knowledge systems while creating new approaches to restoration leadership.

➤ **Create an Indigenous-Faith Restoration Alliance**

Establish a dedicated platform for collaboration between Indigenous communities and faith organizations on land restoration in the lead-up to UNFCCC COP30 in Brazil. This platform should include protocols for knowledge sharing, rights-based advocacy, joint implementation, and equitable benefit distribution.

➤ **Build Urban-Rural Sacred Restoration Corridors**

Develop programs connecting urban religious institutions to rural restoration through "sister site" partnerships, shared learning, and resource flows. Focus on creating ecological corridors between urban sacred spaces and rural restoration areas.

➤ **Launch a Faith-Business Restoration Partnership Platform**

Create a structured mechanism for collaboration between faith organizations and businesses on landscape restoration. Focus on joint investment in restoration projects, technology transfer, and market development for restoration products.

➤ **Launch a Global Sacred Waters Restoration Initiative**

Establish a coordinated program focusing on restoring degraded marine and aquatic ecosystems that hold spiritual significance across faith traditions, leveraging the deep cultural connections communities maintain with their oceans, seas, and inland water bodies to drive ecological restoration.

➤ **Strengthen Regional Faith-Restoration Networks**

Invest in building regional and sub-regional interfaith coordination hubs that align land restoration work with local ecological and cultural contexts. These networks should strengthen existing religious structures while building technical restoration capabilities.

➤ **Create an Interfaith Restoration Policy Working Group**

Establish a high-level body to engage collaboratively across all 3 Rio Conventions and advocate for supportive policies, including a focus on land rights, restoration finance, and integration of faith-led approaches in national restoration strategies.

➤ **Support Faith Community Restoration Enterprises**

Provide technical and financial support for community-based restoration innovations and enterprises emerging from faith communities. Focus on sustainable livelihoods through restoration, including seed collection, nursery development, and ecosystem monitoring.

➤ **Create a Faith Restoration Research and Innovation Network**

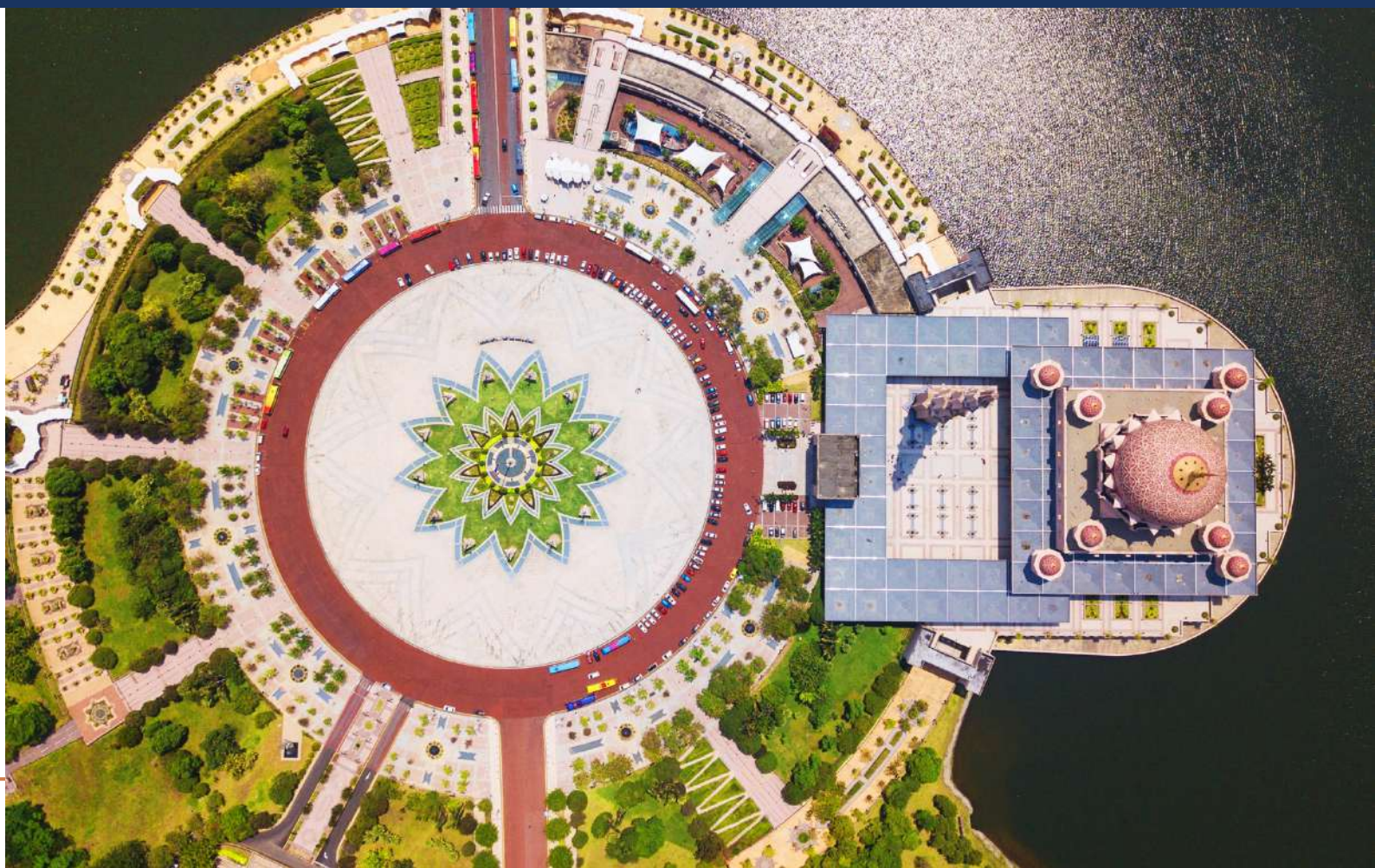
Establish a global network linking religious institutions, research centers, and restoration practitioners to accelerate innovation in faith-led approaches. Focus on developing and testing new restoration methodologies that integrate spiritual practices with scientific techniques, documenting traditional ecological knowledge, and creating an evidence base for scaling successful approaches. Include dedicated funding for faith-led research projects.

➤ **Integrate Cultural Heritage and Restoration**

Develop specialized approaches that combine ecosystem restoration with preservation of religious art, architecture, and cultural landscapes. This should include technical guidelines for restoring degraded lands around heritage sites, integrating traditional craftsmanship in restoration work, and documenting cultural practices that support ecosystem recovery. The focus would be on creating restoration methodologies that enhance rather than compromise historical elements while achieving restoration goals. Special attention should be paid to living heritage sites where religious practices continue alongside restoration activities



Advances in scientific knowledge, technical capacity, and material resources need to be matched by a parallel will for implementation. History has demonstrated that this gap between knowledge and action can be bridged by faith - religious faith, faith in humanity, or faith in the possibilities that emerge through collaboration.





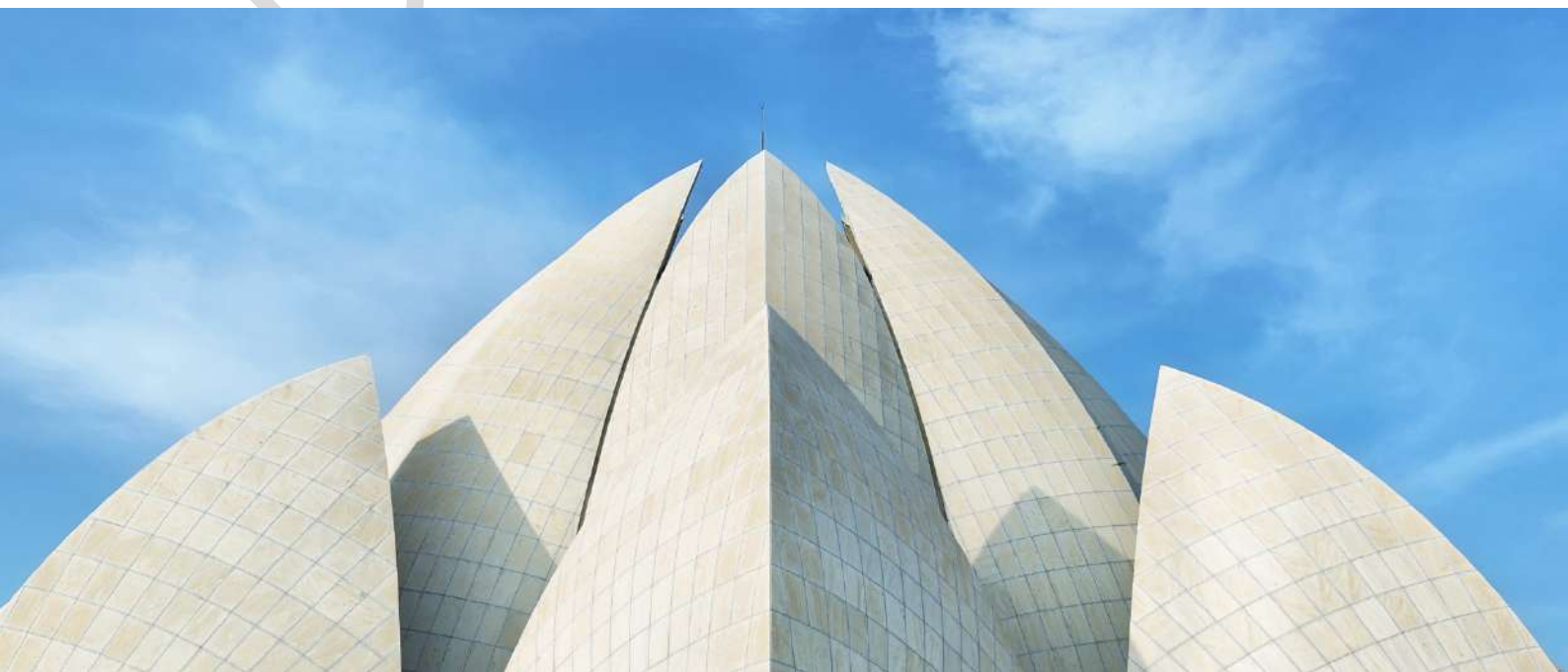
# Multi-Faith 'Rio Trio'

## Call to Action

In the lead-up to the Rio Conventions COPs of 2024 (UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD), the G20 GLI convened a process and gathering to develop and launch the Triple COP Faith Call to Action, a comprehensive interfaith statement that echoes the collaborative spirit of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

The Call to Action, signed by over 100 organizations, emphasizes the unique role of faith-led organizations in addressing this crisis. Spanning the globe and reaching billions, faith communities have the power to inspire action, bridge the gap between knowledge and implementation, and nurture the spiritual and ethical foundations necessary for protecting and restoring the environment.

A key aspect of this interfaith initiative is recognizing that faith can bridge the gap between knowledge and action. While we have made significant advances in scientific understanding and technical capacity, the statement argues that the inspiration to act in profound and collective ways often stems from faith—be it religious faith, faith in humanity, or faith in the power of collaboration.



## The Multifaith Call to Action

As we approach a pivotal alignment of the meetings of the three Rio Conventions in 2024, we, leaders, representatives, and organizations from diverse faith traditions and other communities, unite our voices to address the urgent environmental crisis facing our planet. In this critical moment, we stand to reaffirm and reinvigorate the visionary spirit that birthed these United Nations conventions at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit: UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (CCC), and Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD).

Since then, we have seen the global community come together to advance and reaffirm that vision in various ways. We recognize, however, that we are falling short in protecting the environment and safeguarding it for future generations: we are on track to miss the 1.5 degree goal of the Paris Agreement, in the past 50 years we have lost approximately 70% of global biodiversity, and up to 40% of the world's land is degraded, affecting the livelihoods of about 3.2 billion people.

In the face of these challenges, the wisdom of Rio in 1992 rings true today: the crises of nature and biodiversity loss, climate change, and desertification, among others, are intrinsically linked and mutually reinforcing, demanding a coordinated global response. They reflect humanity's discordant relationship with the rest of the natural world. As we face these interconnected challenges, a comprehensive and restorative approach is necessary to truly "make peace with Nature," aligning with the principles of the Rio Conventions.

Advances in scientific knowledge, technical capacity, and material resources need to be matched by a parallel will for implementation. History has demonstrated that this gap between knowledge and action can be bridged by faith - religious faith, faith in humanity, or faith in the possibilities that emerge through collaboration. The inspiration to act in unique, profound, and collective ways, conscious of our responsibility to present and future generations, can ensure that words on a page become a lived reality for the planet.

**To do so, to heal our fractured relationship with the natural world, requires cooperation and action at every level:**

- Globally and nationally, we must realign policies and actions to reflect the urgency and interconnectedness of biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation, ensuring that all efforts are consistent with the targets and commitments set forth by the Rio Conventions.
- Locally, we must encourage and nurture community-based, whole-of-society initiatives that honor and protect the ecosystems that sustain life.
- Internally, we must cultivate coherence between inner and outer restoration, recognizing that our personal and collective flourishing is inextricably linked to the health of our planet.

As people of faith and goodwill, we offer these as pathways towards a flourishing world for all. Dialogue and collaboration across boundaries and borders will be instrumental in overcoming the challenges before us. We, therefore, call for enhanced cooperation and partnerships across all lines of distinction to fulfill the objectives of the Rio Conventions and ensure a sustainable future for all.

Now, the fundamental challenge is to return to the spirit of collective effort and potential that animated humanity in 1992. Beyond trying to stop a downward spiral, if we muster the limitless human capacity to break through deadlocks, we can create unprecedented global solidarity and help bring about a better future for all.

Recognizing previous declarations and activities from faith communities on the importance of environmental care, we hereby sign this new Call to Action, reaffirming our commitment to the vision of the Rio Conventions and our sacred responsibility to nurture and protect our planet alongside the rest of Nature.







# Conclusion

The findings of this stocktake demonstrate the substantial opportunity to leverage faith communities' distinctive capacities for large-scale ecosystem restoration. Religious institutions possess unique assets that align powerfully with restoration imperatives - from extensive land holdings across diverse ecosystems to intergenerational knowledge transfer systems that sustain long-term stewardship. Their ability to integrate spiritual and physical dimensions of restoration while maintaining deep community trust offers approaches that could fundamentally transform how restoration is conceived and implemented globally.

Critical gaps must be addressed to fully realize this potential. Faith institutions frequently require enhanced access to technical expertise and scientific knowledge, financing mechanisms need better alignment with religious approaches and values, and faith-led contributions often lack sufficient recognition in global frameworks. The identified cross-cutting principles of the stocktake provide clear guidance for addressing these challenges while preserving the distinctive characteristics that make faith-led approaches effective. These principles emphasize the essential integration of inner and outer restoration, rights-based approaches centering on local communities, and the strategic leveraging of religious infrastructure.

Implementation demands sustained investment in religious leadership development and institutional capacity building while ensuring faith organizations can fully engage in restoration efforts while maintaining their spiritual integrity.

Looking ahead, faith communities are positioned to play an increasingly vital role in global restoration given their moral authority on land stewardship, extensive networks reaching billions, and demonstrated ability to maintain multi-generational commitment. This strategic moment presents a unique opportunity to develop restoration approaches that simultaneously regenerate ecosystems and strengthen human relationships with nature through the thoughtful engagement of religious institutions' distinctive capabilities.

# Acknowledgments

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## **Working Group Members Organizations**

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Pro Social World  
UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration  
UN High-Level Climate Champions  
UNEP Faith for Earth  
World Resources Institute (WRI) Faith and Sustainability Initiative  
World Vision  
WWF's Beliefs & Values Programme

## **Consultative Meetings**

ACT Alliance  
AEON  
Anglican Communion  
ATGlobal  
AVPN Singapore  
Baha'i International Community  
Brahma Kumaris  
Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation  
Casa Galilea  
Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA)  
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Center for Earth Ethics  
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Interbeing  
Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development  
Interfaith Meditation Centre  
Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA)  
Interfaith Public Health Network  
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Lutheran World Federation  
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Meridian Institute  
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Netzero.sa  
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Wellbeing Economy Alliance  
WJC  
World Council of Churches (WCC)  
World Resources Institute  
World Vision International

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Youth Negotiators Academy (YNA)

## Survey

Afroledge Group  
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Desertification

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