

Water and Faith: 2019 World Water Week Engagements Summary

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Photo Credit: Johannes Frandsen/WCC

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2019 Water and Faith Co-Conveners

Executive summary

During the 2019 World Water Week, Swedish Water House's Cluster Group on Water and Faith in partnership with the Church of Sweden and the World Council of Churches convened the now 4th annual Water and Faith Showcase and Network Meeting involving 68 different participating institutions and organizations.

As in years past these activities aim to align priorities across the water sector to address critical gaps to achieve SDG 6.

This year, the public Showcase focused on mobilising local faith actors to achieve SDG 6 and was co-organised by [Stockholm International Water Institute \(SIWI\)](#), [The World Council of Churches \(WCC\)](#), [Accord WASH Alliance](#), [Living Water International](#), [SMART Centre group](#), and [Tearfund UK](#). The Showcase was followed by the Water and Faith Network Meeting organised by SIWI, [Church of Sweden](#) and WCC presenting the Water and Faith Network, the Swedish Cluster group, activities of the [International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development \(PaRD\)](#) and opportunities for further engagement.

Key concrete outcomes of the Showcase and the Network Meetings included

- Networking and experience sharing among faith based organisations/actors and the water community. Discussions emphasised dialog, raised awareness and trust for successful partnerships.
- Opportunity for the Water and Faith community to feed into the annual World Water Development Report (WWDR) that in 2021 will have the theme 'Valuing water'. Faith based actors are encouraged to contribute to the topic on social and cultural perspective on water.
- The PaRD network launched a new workstream on Environment, Water and Climate action. SIWI and WCC hosted the first meeting which took place after the Network meeting 29 August where co-leaders for the workstream were elected. PaRD members are welcome to get engaged in the new workstream.
- Suggestions on joint events for World Water Week 2020 with thematic 'Water and Climate change'. Many proposals were centred around the need of evidence-based documentation on what FBOs are contributing with on water issues and the need of faith-based leaders to understand the relevance of water.

Please note that the selected interventions and statements included in this summary document have been paraphrased based on written notes and are not direct representations of comments made unless a quotation is indicated. Not all interventions are reflected in this meeting summary.

For additional details on this workstream and partnership development please contact Elizabeth Yaari, Senior Programme Manager, Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) at elizabeth.yaari@siwi.org or Kristina Johansson, Programme Officer, SIWI, at Kristina.johansson@siwi.org.

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Showcase: Water and Faith: Mobilizing local faith actors to achieve SDG6

Convenors: Accord WASH Alliance | Living Water International | SMART Centre group | Stockholm International Water Institute | Tearfund UK | The World Council of Churches

The Showcase event began with an introduction by **Elizabeth Yaari, SIWI**, referring to the 2019 World Water Week theme ‘Water for society: including all’ and stressed the importance of an ‘all hands on deck’ approach, inclusive of communities and institutions of faith, ensuring that everyone has a voice in water decision making. *‘By becoming active stakeholders in water decision making people the world over get to know our shared water resources and value them. Forming this connection is vital to build the sustainable environment and society the SDG agenda calls for’*. She highlighted the urgency of the crisis we face today and the critical role of partnerships and coalitions in improving two-way understanding and cross-sector communication, sharing experience and knowledge, and engaging in joint activities and engagements across diverse communities at different levels.

Elizabeth presented how SIWI are engaging with FBOs through the Swedish Cluster Group for Swedish stakeholders in partnership with Church of Sweden, the international Water and Faith Network and through the workstream on Environment, Water and Climate in Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). She also shared lessons learned from SIWI’s engagement with FBOs such as the long term engagement of FBO’s in local communities, their reach and access in rural areas where development organisations and governments might not be able to operate, and how action with intention can guide behaviour strengthening the connection between people and nature.



The introduction was followed by a convocation by **Henrik Grape, Coordinator of World Council of Churches Working Group on Climate Change, Church of Sweden**. He emphasised that water is essential in discussions about climate change, discussions which seriousness is often ignored, but now things are happening with youth activists leading the way. Faith leaders can play a central role in connecting nature and human, and through the understanding of the interconnectivity between all life on earth contribute to a sustainable use of water. *‘Water is part of the creation and the creation is a gift from God. You don’t sell gifts- you share them.’*



The session continued going from a broader “water and faith” conversation to practical examples of inclusive engagement with faith actors in WASH programs.

Ana Rivera, Living Water International, facilitated the discussion about the different case studies showcasing what it can look like mobilising local actors to achieve SDG 6.

Jonathan Wiles, Living Water International, presented the toolkit Flourish, a process of building vision and a shared agenda amongst networks of faith actors from the national to the local level, engaging

them in the design, implementation, and sustaining of district-wide WASH programs. Tearfund was one of the partners developing the project and **Munyaradzi Charuka, Tearfund UK**, told how the toolkit got churches and communities to work together in sanitation and water security planning, through e.g. storytelling.

A pilot project has been implemented in Zuma district in Zambia engaging churches, local communities and national governments. About 15 churches in region participated and some of the lessons learned were that churches' involvement help create acceptance and respect for the project from national government, both church and traditional leaders should be trained using the toolkit, and the need from facilitators to have handbooks in existing technical WASH approaches using a simple language.



Jonathan further emphasised that nowadays the question for the broader development sector is not *whether* to engage with faith actors, but *how*. However, it is important to recognize how complex this task is, as not all faith actors are the same. *'Religious literacy is critical—organizations need to use religious language to engage with the theological beliefs of local people. But in doing this, we have to be careful to treat faith actors as true partners rather than "instrumentalising" or "using" them to advance our own agendas.'*



Henk Holtslag, advisor at SMART centre, spoke about how SMART centres train entrepreneurs in maintenance of simple, market based, affordable and repairable technologies. The centres are based in five African countries, and the one in Malawi has a program called Faith and water. The program includes training and capacity building of faith leaders and lay man and women, who bring their knowledge to communities. The centres focus on solutions such as simple water pumps, rainwater harvesting and water filters made for local means and of

local materials. Henk highlighted that local faith actors are in communities on a long-term basis, not due to project time or election periods, why the partnerships and engagement becomes long-term and sustainable. *'I always say that the most important are the three Ts: Training, Training, Training. Capacity building is crucial.'*

Dinesh Suna, Coordinator of the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) at World Council of Churches, presented how the EWN started in 2006 as a platform of Christian churches and organizations committed to increasing access to safe drinking water and a dignified sanitation worldwide. Today the network consists of 350 member churches in 120 countries, all committed to the WCC water agenda. Connected to the member churches are thousands of educational institutes that have been mapped out and together and through them a WASH curriculum will be introduced. Influencing young minds by having subjects on WASH can make them aware of the importance of WASH. This will also make the concerned educational institutions, as well as the governments, accountable towards having WASH facilities in the schools. Dinesh stressed the importance to concretize the dialogue between FBOs and the water community and to provide evidence-based research on faith communities contribution to water security.

Tebaldo Vinciguerra, Representative of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Holy See,

contributed with a reflection and response to the presented case studies. The motivation to change and to reach the last mile, the poorest, the refugees and vulnerable communities must come from genuine values and principles. Lay people are the experts and a lot of action is already taking place on local level, through hospitals, monasteries and football teams. How can we learn from what is done in these institutions and scale it up? Tebaldo further spoke about how engagement with FBOs require time to build trust and healthy partnerships between organisations. There is a need for respect for different cultures and values.



The participants in the Showcase was then asked to discuss two questions; ‘What do you think are (or could be) key aspects from successful inclusive WASH engagement with faith actors and/or faith based communities?’ and ‘What are the most relevant and realistic water issues for WASH and faith actors to jointly engage in?’.



The answers were fed into Mentimeter and **Katarina Veem, director of SIWI Swedish Water House,** then facilitated the discussion and following topics were brought up during the large group discussion. Key feedbacks from the mentimeter included:

- The need to have mutual respect between religions regarding water stewardship, to find a common ground between religions.
- We need to move away from a very anthropocentric discussion, should also include the importance of water for ecosystems and other life forms on earth.
- Faith and Water discussions should also include menstrual hygiene, gender equality, girls’ education, poverty eradication, as these are crucial contributions to development.
- In a rural context, religious leaders are often the first person to go to if you want to inspire people to behavioural change.
- In many cases the church reaches the poor as they know the context and the community.
- FBO and faith actors can work as safety mechanisms for the people who, for example, cannot afford to buy their own latrine. Thus, important that the church do not take over the responsibility of the state or government as a duty bearer.



Other key words that were highlighted in the discussion were the need for faith literacy, respectful dialogues, use of multi faith approaches, trust and complementarity, transparency, spending the time it takes to discover shared values, respecting local communities and contexts, and raised awareness of water protection and rights.



The Showcase was wrapped up by closing remarks by **Kristina Johansson, Programme Officer, SIWI**, who called for joint action from faith-based organisations and the water community to continue the dialogue and exchange of experiences in order to achieve the basic human rights to clean water and sanitation. She referred to the theme of World Water Week 2019 'Water for society: including all' and the key role faith actors can play in reaching rural communities and to make sure no one is left behind. The realisation of SDG 6 requires partnerships, and

everyone was invited to sign up for the Water and Faith Network mailing list to keep posted on upcoming joint activities and engagements.

Water and Faith Network Meeting

The network meeting was organised by SIWI, WCC and Church of Sweden and gathered representatives from 30+ organisations. The meeting aimed to convene active stakeholders at the intersect of water and faith engagements. Invited participants included representatives from UNEP, GIZ, UN-Water, Water for Good, Global Aid, Faith in Water, Global One, Waterpreneurs, Swedish Mission Council, Catholic Relief Service, Brahma Kumaris, DORCAS, the Holy See, WWF, the Jewish congregation, IAS, Caritas, BLIA, World Evangelical Alliance Sustainability Center, etc.

Elizabeth Yaari, SIWI, chaired the meeting together with **Joakim Harlin** from the **United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)**.

The meeting began with **Engin Koncagul** from **UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP)** who shared with assembled participants information regarding the consultation process around the annual World Water Development Report (WWDR) which is a United Nations flagship report, specifically elevating opportunities for input to the 2021 Value of Water report. The WWAP is a collaboration with numerous members of the water society and about 70 agencies are involved. The target group for the report are

policy and decision makers and the report strives to be as policy relevant as possible. This year's report was on the theme 'Leaving no one behind', next year will be 'Water and climate change' and in 2021 'Valuing Water'. The main perspectives that are currently being drafted for the Value of Water 2021 report are: the water resource (including ecosystems), basic human needs for water services (such as drinking water, sanitation, hygiene, WASH), other social-cultural values, economic



Photo: Lotta Samuelson

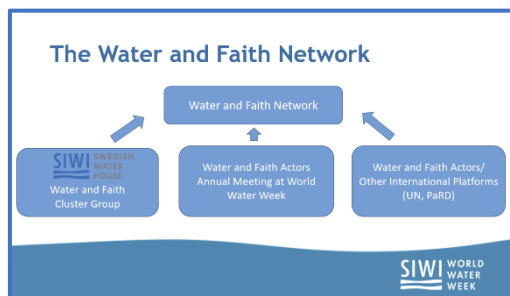
production sectors (including food and agriculture, energy and industry). Faith related issues could be brought up under the headline of social-cultural values and input from faith actors are welcome. SIWI will be participating in the consultation process around the 2021 Value of Water report and will subsequently invite input from all Network participants.

A round of **introductions of participants** in the room showed a variety of organisations represented. Everyone was asked to reflect on what thematic issues they would like to see during next year's World Water Week Water and Faith session. Many brought up the need of evidence-based documents on what FBOs are contributing with on water issues, as well as the need of religious literacy to understand the nexus of religion and development. A greater understanding from religious leaders on the relevance of WASH and water management was expressed and how that can be facilitated as interfaith activities contributing to peace building and conflict prevention. More focus on climate change and indigenous knowledge, bringing focus on how local knowledge and practices can contribute to wise water management. It was also called for greater and better integration of gender perspectives and a wish for more focus on menstrual hygiene. Sacred forests were also a topic brought up as possible thematic area, as well as faith investments and initiatives. World Water Day and World

Toilet Day are possible channels through which the faith and water work can be showcased and communicated.

Joakim Harlin, UNEP, wrapped up the introduction round by emphasizing that passion is one of the biggest values that leads to meaning and behavioural change. 80% of people in the world subscribe to some kind of religion which is one reason why it becomes key to work together with faith-based actors. There is a need to work inhouse to mobilize members. He encouraged everyone to contribute to the report on Valuing Water and added that *who will contribute if not you?*

Elizabeth Yaari further elaborated on the Water and Faith Network, which consists of participants involved in the Swedish Cluster Group, actors involved in the annual Water and Faith events during World Water Week and actors engaged in other international platforms (such as UN, PaRD).



SIWI's SWH Cluster Group

- Coalition of partners: Church of Sweden, Buddhas Light International Association (BLIA), Swedish Mission Council, Epemienkyrkan, Caritas Sverige, Judiska församlingen, Brahma Kumaris and more
- Creating a common issue agenda for Swedish Stakeholders at the intersection of water and faith
- Visit www.swedishwaterhouse.se/en/cluster-groups/water-and-faith/

Water and Faith International Network

Annual events and Network meetings at the World Water Week

Aims:

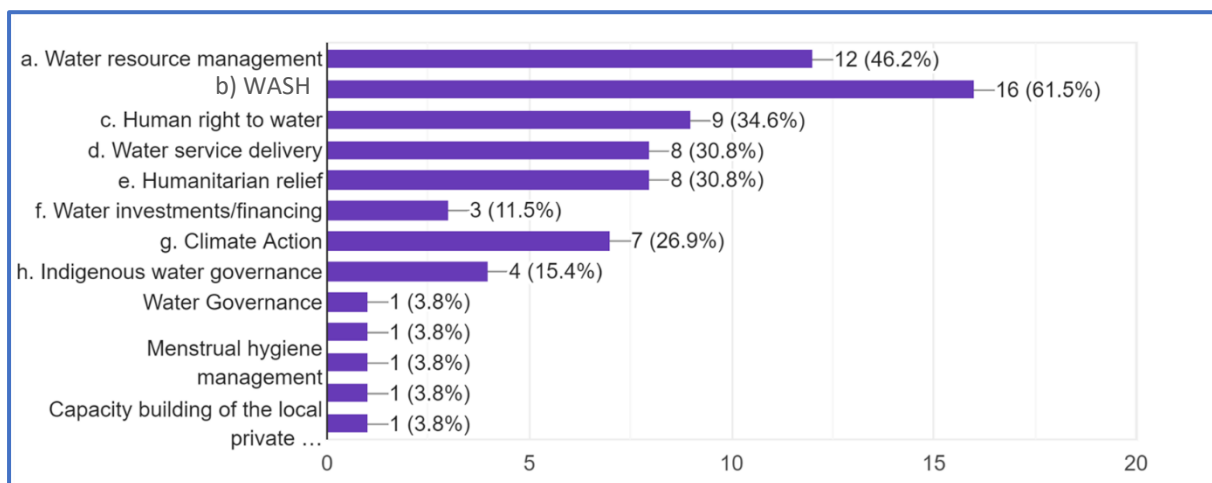
- Fostering partnerships,
- Create space for dialogue,
- Foster mutual understanding,
- Knowledge exchange

Launch of PaRD Workstream

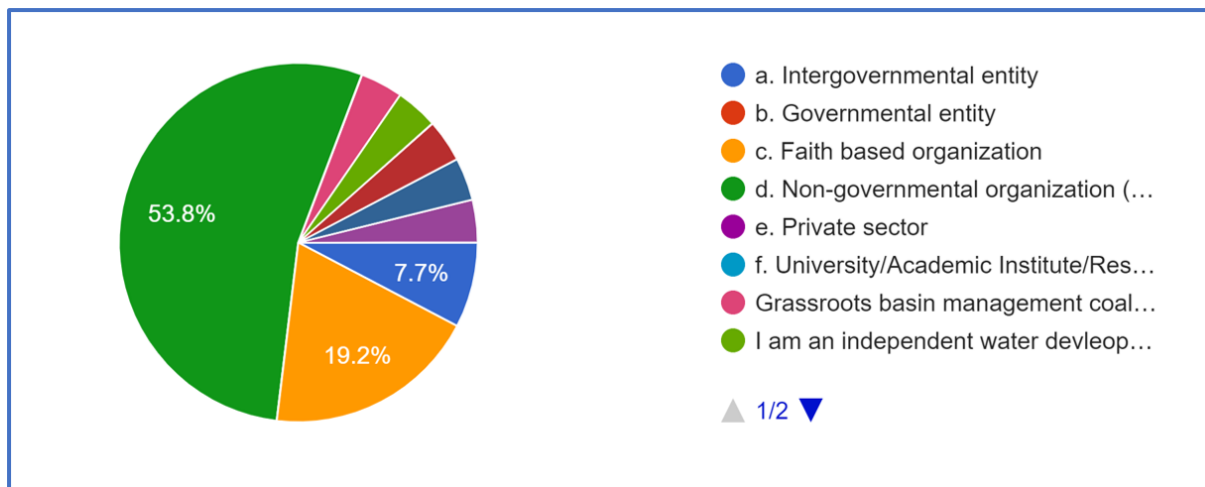
- New PaRD workstream on Environment, Water and Climate Action to further advance engagement and joint action around SDG 6, 13, 14, 15.
- Aims to foster joint advocacy, knowledge development and exchange, and build capacity to engage the whole of society in the environmental SDG agenda.
- First official meeting taking place today!

Prior to the Network Meeting, a Water and Faith network survey was disseminated in June in order for SIWI to better understand the makeup of the Network participants and main interests. **Kristina Johansson, SIWI**, presented the results of the survey, which had 26 respondents. Some key aspects from the survey were presented, such as:

Main areas of water related work that the different organisations are involved in:



Types of organisations represented in the Water and Faith Network:



The survey also showed that about 50% of the actors are affiliated with a faith-based tradition and about 50% are not. Africa was main geographical area where organisations are active, followed by Europe, Asia and South America.

Main interest of joint engagement is focused on networking, new partnerships, capacity building, joint advocacy, commitment to act/action oriented activities, better understand and bridge the work of FBOs and the water community. Lack of resources (both in terms of financial and time), lack of action oriented activities, lack of gender perspective and difficulty to create a common agenda were all identified as challenges for engagement.

Main reasons for engagement and interest in the Water and Faith Network:

- Networking (80%)
- Knowledge exchange (76%)
- New partnerships (73%)
- Capacity building (61%)
- Mobilize action (46%)

SIWI SWEDISH WATER HOUSE

Henrik Grape, Church of Sweden, told about the Swedish cluster group that Church of Sweden is co-convening together with SIWI. The Cluster Group gathers Swedish stakeholders on the theme of Water and Faith for dialogue, knowledge exchange and inspiration. The focus has been the role of water in respective faith traditions and how water can be linked to respective organisations' work. An important aspect is the spirituality of water and how our connection with nature influence how we manage our resources and how we make sure that is done in a just way. Based on those discussions, the cluster group is planning to organise some kind of visual event or ceremony around water during next year's World Water Week (similar to the Interfaith Climate Summit in Uppsala 2008).



Photo: Lotta Samuelson

Bennet Gabriel, PaRD Secretariat, and Dinesh Suna, WCC, then presented the new workstream within PaRD: Environment, Water and Climate Action. PaRD brings together governmental and intergovernmental entities with diverse civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs), to engage the social capital and capacities vested in diverse faith communities for sustainable development and humanitarian assistance in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. PaRD focuses on joint activities in the following areas of engagement: knowledge

exchange, capacity building and joint advocacy. There has previously been three workstreams: Sustaining Peace (SDG 16), Gender Equality and Empowerment (SDG 5), Health (SDG 3), but at the day of the meeting the **new workstream Environment, Water and Climate Action (EWCA) (SDGs 6, 13,14,15) convened their first meeting.**

The goal of the EWCA work-stream is increased collaboration across diverse communities, and the engagement and contribution of faith actors and faith-based approaches in global efforts to advance SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15. During the first year, the EWCA work-stream will focus its efforts on knowledge exchange and joint advocacy events. Activities related to capacity building will not be planned for the first year but could be included in future years. The first official launch meeting of the workstream was hosted by SIWI and WCC and held directly after the network meeting. During the meeting following organisations were elected as co-leaders of the new work-stream: UNEP, World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance, Tear Fund and Global One.

The Water and Faith Network Meeting was wrapped up by some reflections from participants bringing forth that the meeting would have benefitted from a wider diversity of representation from different faiths and a greater integration of gender perspective. Migration and water related issues were also requested to be addressed within the Water and Faith space.

In conclusion, SIWI's Elizabeth Yaari concluded the meeting's discussions expressing that SIWI is very pleased and proud to convene these meetings at World Water Week and is also open for more meetings at other places over the year.

Please feel free to email us suggestions and ideas for continuing joint actions and opportunities for partnership. We would like to make some concrete collaborative actions and invite you all to be part of this conversation.

Additional Water and Faith Resources

[World Water Week event page *Water and Faith: Mobilizing local faith actors to achieve SDG 6*](#)

Past Water and Faith event Summaries:

[Water and Faiths: Faith based Organizations contributing to the Water SDGs, 2016](#)

[Water and Faith: Acting in Partnership to Achieve SDG 6 2018 World Water Week Engagements Summary, 2018](#)

The Swedish Cluster Group homepage (in Swedish):

<http://www.swedishwaterhouse.se/sv/klustergrupper/vatten-och-tro/>

The Swedish Cluster Group and International Network webpage (in English)

<http://www.swedishwaterhouse.se/en/cluster-groups/water-and-faith/>