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Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities

EVIDENCE REVIEW

FAITH AND CLIMATE MIGRATION

JLI - State of the Evidence

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Christian Aid: Dr. Cathy Bollaert, Dr. Lila Caballero Sosa, Adebola Adeeko

JLI staff and consultants: Andrés Martinez, Dr. Jodie Salter, Florine De Wolf, Noor Ur Rehman, Alvin Andanje, Maurice A. Bloem

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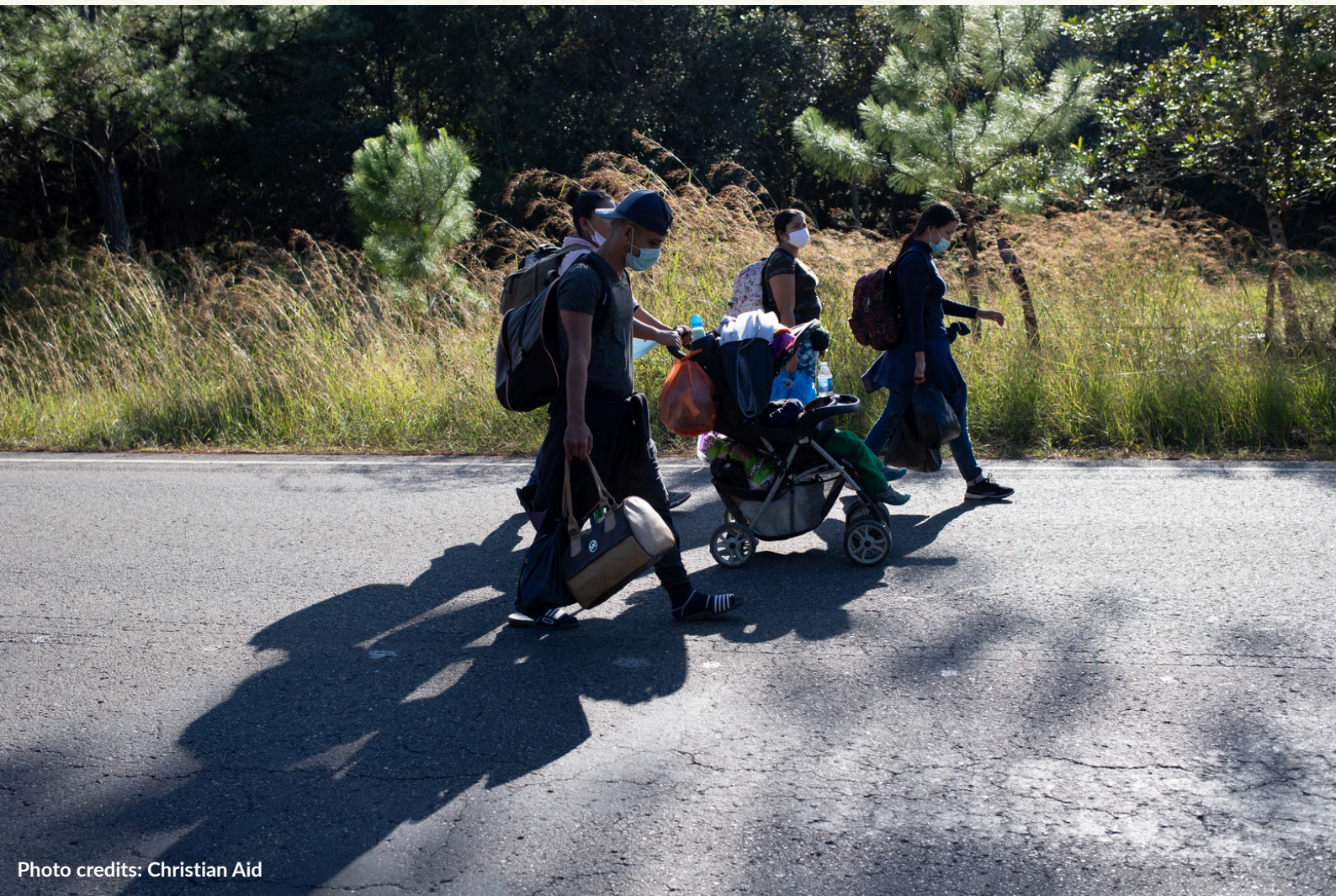

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1 INTRODUCTION

Climate migration is no longer a distant scenario; it is now a present-day challenge. Around the world, rising seas, shifting rainfall patterns, flooding, droughts, and heatwaves are forcing people from their homes through both slow-onset pressures and sudden, catastrophic events. Irrespective of whether people are forced to leave their homes gradually or overnight, the human consequences are profound. Climate-induced migration affects livelihoods, people's health and identity, and stability. Current knowledge on this growing crisis largely overlooks faith actors, even though they offer material aid, emotional support, spiritual guidance, and a sense of belonging to people facing displacement. Despite their frontline presence, the contributions and needs of faith actors are often missing from climate policy, humanitarian programming, and academic literature. Rather, their actions are incorporated into broader responses led by governments and NGOs or left undocumented altogether. Yet in many places, **these actors are not only the first responders, they are the only consistent presence** accompanying displaced people before, during, and after their journeys.

This report aims to better understand and elevate the role of religion and faith actors in response to climate-induced migration.

It draws on a comprehensive literature review produced by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) in collaboration with Christian Aid, and the insights garnered from listening dialogues[1] held in South Asia, East Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). These dialogues brought together community leaders, faith actors, researchers, and humanitarian workers to reflect on what faith actors are already doing, and most importantly, what support they need to continue their work in a time of growing challenges.

The literature review found that while religion often appears in research on migration or climate change separately, the specific intersection of faith and climate migration is understudied. Too often, religion is treated as a background variable, not the lens through which people actually make sense of the world around them and survive crises. Migration is an increasingly recognized issue in the context of accelerating climate change and is likely to grow in importance with between 3.3 – 3.6 billion people currently living in areas deemed highly vulnerable to climate change (IPCC 2023, 5). Climate migration has received increasing international policy attention.

[1] Listening dialogues are participatory events or processes designed to foster a fair and equitable space for reflection and shared learning among diverse stakeholders such as local faith actors, researchers, and development practitioners. They can serve as the foundation to establish regionally and locally led joint learning networks for advancing evidence. Through participatory conversations, participants can review current state of evidence reports, reflect on personal and professional experiences, identify research priorities, and shape evidence agendas that inform practice and influence policy. Careful attention is given to equitable participation across gender, religion, ethnicity, age, and connectivity needs, with logistical and language support provided to ensure all voices are heard and valued.

For example, at the recent UNFCCC COP29,
→ the **UN Network on Migration released a statement arguing for better protection and support for people migrating due to climate change (2024)**;

→ the **International Organisation on Migration (IOM) launched a 10-year strategy on migration, climate change and the environment (IOM 2021)**;

→ and climate change has been highlighted as a driver of migration in the **Global Compact On Safe and Orderly Migration (2018)**.

The listening dialogues sought to begin filling the gap in the literature on climate migration with knowledge of faith actors' lived experiences. By enriching our current understanding of climate migration with these firsthand, context-specific insights, which are typically absent in theoretical analyses, this knowledge will help bridge the gap between academic frameworks and real-world realities. Participants described the ethical dilemmas, cultural loss, and practical realities they witness daily. They spoke of religious institutions mobilizing resources, advocating for justice, and offering spaces of care and continuity when environmental shocks uproot people's lives.

Many of the themes that emerged cut across regions. People throughout LAC, East Africa, and South Asia talked about how faith actors do much more than offer food or shelter. They help people make sense of what is happening, spiritually, emotionally, and morally. In some cases, when roads are washed out, food is scarce, or temperatures rise, it is the local church or temple that first opens its doors.

In South Asia, dialogue participants emphasized the trauma of losing sacred lands and family heritage.

In East Africa, faith leaders described their role in addressing climate-related conflicts and preserving social cohesion.

In LAC, participants spoke of Indigenous and Afro-descendant traditions, highlighting spiritual responses to displacement and emphasizing community solidarity and historical resilience.

Such stories are not side notes, these narratives form a critical body of evidence that highlight the lived experiences of the ongoing climate crisis.

Faith actors also support people who choose not to migrate. Not all responses to climate stress involve movement. In many cases, people stay, because of faith, identity, ancestral ties, physical risk, or a lack of alternatives. Such diverse decisions deserve the same level of recognition, particularly given that faith communities are often the actors helping to support people as they make these choices. The support faith actors provide in these situations is, however, not without obstacles. Despite their reach and community links, many faith actors lack resources, they are not included in formal crisis response, legal and aid systems (particularly women), and are often missing from climate and migration policy discussions. Their work is essential, but too often it is rendered invisible, seen as informal, even incidental, despite its profound impact.

This report is not intended to be an endpoint, but rather serve as a foundation to recognize and learn from the faith actors who are already responding to climate migration.

The task ahead is to ensure these efforts are not only sustained, but strengthened, through better collaboration and more inclusive evidence-building to inform sustainable, contextually appropriate responses to the climate crises. The evidence review is grounded in the recognition that a comprehensive understanding of, and response to, climate migration must combine social, cultural, religious, and spiritual dimensions with longstanding practitioner knowledge of faith actors' engaging with climate migration.

2 METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

The research began with a **literature review** to map existing evidence on religion, faith actors, and climate migration to build an initial understanding of the evidence gaps and limitations local communities identified, as well as emerging themes on religion, faith actors, and climate migration. Resources collected included academic, policy and practitioner publications, in addition to examples of research centres, programmes of work, projects, and organisations. Searches were conducted across various search engines and databases including JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, EBSCO (Atla), ProjectMUSE, Google, and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities resource library. Purposive searching was conducted for literature in regions relevant to the listening dialogues: South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and East Africa.

The literature review is limited by **language barriers** and the **availability of data online**. Searches were conducted primarily in English, with additional searches in five other languages. The searches for non-English sources returned limited results. Local faith actors or faith-based programmes that do not have an online presence may likewise have been omitted from the online searches.

To gather resources on religion and climate migration during the literature review, variations of the following words and terms were used across the aforementioned databases and search engines:

→ **(Religio* OR faith) AND climate AND migrat***
→ **(Religio* OR faith) AND environment AND migrat***
→ **Religio* AND climate AND migrat***
→ **“Climate-induced migration” AND (religio* OR faith)**

The next step was to design the listening dialogues as a participatory process to emphasize local perspectives on faith and climate-induced migration in Latin America, South Asia, and East Africa. The dialogues brought together over 49 local faith actors, peacebuilders, researchers, and humanitarian and development practitioners.

Participant selection gave priority to those representing diverse religious traditions, genders, ethnicities, age groups, and socio-economic backgrounds with measures taken to address access barriers such as offering translation and interpretation services to ensure linguistic inclusivity.

Facilitators followed a guide that began with trust- and relationship-building activities. Participants introduced themselves, shared the contexts in which they worked, and collectively established ground rules for respectful and safe discussion.

JLI then presented a summary of the current evidence landscape in the region based on the literature review, which included relevant research findings, identified gaps, and illustrative case studies, as a common reference point to spark conversation about the relevance, accessibility, and usefulness of the available evidence.

Participants were invited to reflect on their own experiences with evidence of **a) how they had used (or not used) the evidence**, **b) who determined research priorities**, and **c) how existing evidence aligned with their lived realities.** This step included facilitator-guided semi-structured discussions using a pre-designed questionnaire.

During the listening dialogues, participants were invited to share their own research and evidence needs through facilitated questions such as: **What kinds of evidence are missing? Who should be producing the evidence? For what purpose, and for whom?** This stage empowered participants to define priorities based on their community realities and needs.

Finally, each listening dialogue concluded by discussing the potential for a regional or national Joint Learning Hub. These hubs were envisioned as long-term platforms where local faith actors and their partners could continue to co-produce evidence, share good practices, and influence policy and practice based on locally defined agendas.

In conjunction with Christian Aid, JLI intentionally designed the listening dialogue methodology to be a modular, scalable toolkit that can be implemented at district, national, or regional levels. By using the same core facilitation guide, while adapting logistics (online vs. in-person, interpretation, stipends, and gender inclusion) to local needs, these dialogues can be scaled up or down without sacrificing the equity and depth of participation.

3 KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Climate migration: terminology, scope, contested areas

Climate migration is generally defined as the displacement of people due to the rapid- or slow-onset effects of climate change. It has become a critical area for research and policy in the last 10-15 years, resulting in a large body of literature addressing the varying terms used, the legal provisions for people displaced due to climate change, to the civil society and humanitarian response, and to the experiences of the process of climate migration (Maye and Crépeau 2017; McLeman and Gemenne 2018; Kaczan and Orgill-Meyer 2020; Hoffmann, Šedová, and Vinke 2021; Milán-García et al. 2021; Ghosh and Orchiston 2022; Ofori et al. 2023; Daoust and Selby 2024; Ivanova et al. 2024).

Terms employed to describe people who are displaced due to climate change include migrants, refugees, and displaced people. Each has social, political, and legal implications, and research suggests that they might provoke differences in perception, especially in a post-migration context (Mayer 2016; Gemenne 2017; Cubie 2018; Albro 2019). 'Refugee,' for example, might have strong moral connotations and avocational potential (Gemenne 2017; Albro 2019; Biermann and Boas 2012, 292) though it has generally fallen out of use due to difficulties establishing a clear legal definition (Tabassum 2022; Apap and Harju 2023; Karanja and Abdul-Razak 2018). Critiques of the term highlight the racialized and reductionist discourses often associated with the term refugee (Jolly and Ahmad 2019; Hiraide 2023), the limitations of using a term which focuses solely on climate as the cause, possibly at the expense of other ecological and environmental factors (Gauci 2017), and on the limited legal paradigms for the category of climate refugee (Jolly and Ahmad 2019).'Migrant' might be seen as a more neutral or broader term, while 'displaced people' puts the focus back on the people, rather than using a label (Hiraide 2023; Apap and Harju 2023). Research conducted in Vietnam and Kenya suggests that self-identification as a refugee or migrant depends on the nature of the climate impact that caused the displacement; refugee is preferred by those displaced by rapid-onset impacts, and migrant by slow-onset impacts (Nguyen et al. 2024).

There are important discussions on scope and legal recognition of migration due to climate change: climate change and climate migration have many factors, and it is often difficult to outline a clear and direct cause between climate change impacts and migration (Mayer 2016; Hiraide 2023). The only mention of climate change in the UN Global Compact on

Refugees (UN 2018) states that "[w]hile not in themselves causes of refugee movements, climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements." The reasons why people migrate due to climate change are complex and multifactorial. Nabong et al. (2023), for example, outline 21 factors that affect climate migration decision-making.[2]

Legal recognition here refers to the extent to which persons displaced by climate change are recognized by current legal frameworks or international law, and if these categorizations are sufficient for their protection, or if on the contrary, new normative instruments are needed. Legally recognizing "climate migrants" would fill a critical protection gap by creating a category of rights under international and national law, rights that currently do not exist. If recognized, states would have to admit or provide protection to those affected by flooding, high temperatures, and crop failures, or when homes become uninhabitable due to climate impacts. This shift would require a clear and consistent eligibility criteria. A global convention could standardize protection, with regional pacts potentially serving as pragmatic first steps.

Furthermore, there are several conceptual tensions that emerge in the literature about how climate migration can be understood (Letta, Montalbano, and Paolantonio 2024):

Migration due to the direct vs. indirect effects of climate change. As with fast vs. slow onset migration, indirect effects of climate change (such as mental health) are more difficult to connect with causation and, therefore, if the person or affected communities have a right to hypothetical protections for climate migrants.

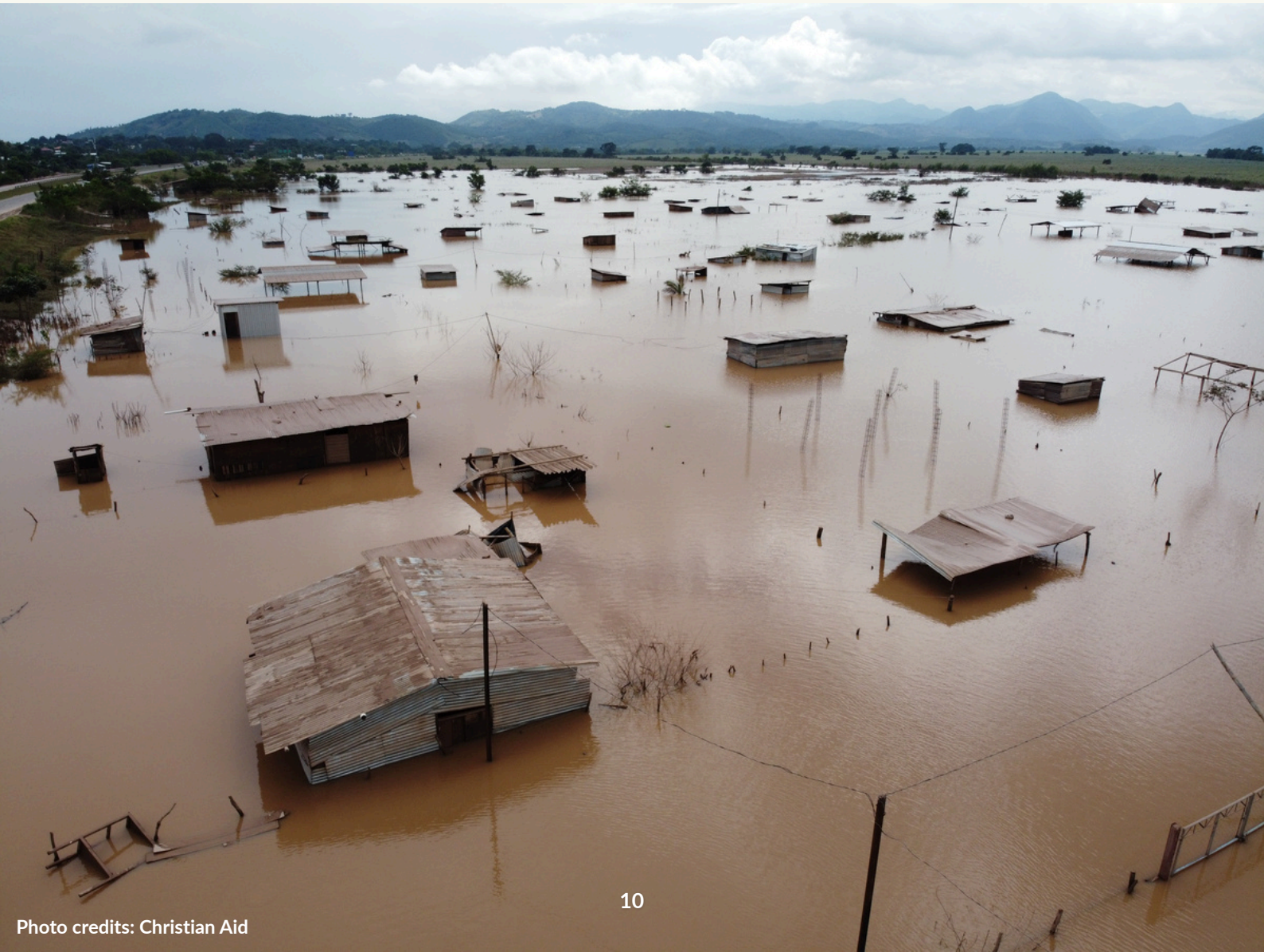
Internal vs. international climate migration: migration may look distinct in different areas of the world, particularly in cases where seasonal migration occurs, which might result in internal climate migration being overlooked.

Migration due to fast vs. slow onset events, for example, environmental hazards or disasters versus temperature increase over time. It is more difficult to prove causality in slow onset events and, thus, they are less recognized and researched.

[2] In terms of frequency of occurrence in "feedback loops" across reviewed literature, the top ten factors in descending order were: financial capital, food security, livelihood, political stability, environmental degradation, resources security, health, social capital, and aid programmes (Nabong et al. 2023, 11).

Mobility vs. immobility: even in cases where climate migration occurs, many people may not be socially or economically able to migrate due other factors, especially in the case of slow-onset impacts, where economic resources might become drained over time.

Migration as adaptation to climate change: while it is important to support people migrating due to climate change and provide safe routes to do so (see the Climate and Migration Coalition), this cannot be the only response to climate change. Likewise, there might be social, cultural, spiritual, or religious reasons why people do not want to migrate - 'voluntary immobility' - and this choice should also be supported by aid agencies and governments as a legitimate option.



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3.2 Religion and climate change

Research on religion and climate change demonstrates the varied ways religion(s) and faith actors engage with climate action and environmental sustainability. Religious, spiritual, and theological narratives are employed to frame (the experience of) climate change and environmental degradation (Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider 2018; Bertana 2020; Fair 2018; Veldman, et al 2014; Bertana 2020). From local to international levels, faith actors often lead climate action or activism, and they play a key role in translating for their communities between religious narratives and climate science, as well as local-global debates on climate change (Bell 2014; Davis 2021; Bird et al. 2021; Koehrsen 2021; Luetz and Nunn 2021; Smith, Adam, and Maarif 2023; Glaab 2017; Hearn et al. 2024; Bomberg and Hague 2018).

There is likewise evidence that religious and spiritual losses may be (and indeed are already being) incurred due to climate change, particularly for indigenous peoples (Whyte 2019; Drew 2014; Albro 2019; Farbotko and McMichael 2019). According to Albro, there is a tendency to treat intangible heritage as secondary or less important than what is tangible. Such tendency undermines meaningful engagement with non-economic loss, especially among indigenous communities. Religion may also provide an important way of coping with climate change through (environmental) rituals and spiritual or community resources, for example (Ombati 2021; Bell 2014; Bomberg and Hague 2018). A common theme emerging in this research is the synthesis or hybridity of religious and spiritual traditions in adapting to and processing the experiences of climate change, as well as interfaith collaboration for climate action (Smith, Adam, and Maarif 2023; Schuman et al. 2018; UNEP 2019b).

3.3 Religion and migration

Research on religion and migration or displacement demonstrates how religion and faith actors frame the experience of displacement and offer important (in)tangible support to displaced people, respectively. Religious or spiritual narratives are applied to migration, displacement, and borders (Hampson et al. 2014; Snyder 2015; Saunders, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Snyder 2016; Phan 2016; Collier 2018; Gagaeolo, Hemstock, and Price 2020; Munyao 2021; Ben-Nun 2021; R and Bacote 2021). Faith actors likewise have a long history of providing support for migrants and refugees. This support can be both tangible or material and intangible, for example spiritual or psychosocial, and also extends to advocacy for the rights of refugees, migrants, and displaced people at local to international policy levels (Nzapalainga, Kobine Layama, and Guerekoyame Gbangou 2014; Hollenbach 2014; Wilkinson and Ager 2017; Lyck-Bowen and Owen 2019; Wurtz and Wilkinson 2020; Hollenbach 2023; Trotta and Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2022). Where displacement is a result of conflict, faith actors may also play a peacebuilding role; faith-based organisations (FBOs) are recognized in the UN Global Compact on Refugees as offering “conflict prevention, reconciliation, and peacebuilding” (UN 2018).

In some cases, however, religion may act as a driver of displacement or may complicate the process of migration where, for example, conflict is in part a result of religious or spiritual conflict, or where post-migration contexts are subject to inter-religious tensions (Kanu 2019; Fiddian-Qasmiyah et al. 2020).

3.4 Key themes in faith and climate migration

There is limited research on the nexus between religion and climate migration, despite rich evidence demonstrating faith actors' roles in climate action and migration/displacement. Here, we highlight the key themes that emerged from the review of this faith-climate migration nexus.

3.4.1 Religion as demography and culture

Where research on climate migration mentions religion, it is often included as a demographic marker or is implied through references to 'culture' (Tan 2018; Zellentin 2010; Makki et al. 2024; Mijangos Aguilera 2023; Lujala et al. 2020; McLeman and Gemenne 2018; Arias and Blair 2024). Yet, we know from research and practice on faith and migration, and faith and climate change, that religion and faith actors play a much richer role - religion can shape how communities and individuals make sense of the world around them and every decision they make.

3.4.2. Religion framing (the experience of) climate migration

Religion or faith can be an important way of framing and shaping the experience of climate migration. This occurs in normative research taking a theological or religious ethical and top-down approach (Southgate 2009; Ben-Nun 2021; Slater 2024), in faith-based institutional guidance on supporting displaced people (Vatican 2021), and in research highlighting how lived experiences of climate migration may be framed with religious or spiritual beliefs and narratives (Fair 2018; Ahmad 2019; Farbotko 2018).

Research on how international organizations, faith-based actors and governments, and those affected by climate migration employ these narratives and framings locally and is limited. In their edited collection on climate change adaptation in Fiji, Luetz and Nunn (2021) take this approach and demonstrate how religious beliefs and narratives are inherent to the experience of a quickly changing climate. The story of Noah narrated in the Bible,[3] which is often brought up in the context of climate change and research with faith communities, demonstrates how there may be multiple (re)interpretations of the narrative.

[3] The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, 3 and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. 4 Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made." Genesis 7: 1-4 (New International Version).

Interpreting the story of Noah

Fair's 2018 ethnographic study in the pacific islands found three interpretations of the Noah story: (1) the denial of anthropogenic climate change, (2) preparation for climate change adaptation and/or migration, and (3) solidarity with those left behind. Religious narratives are also highlighted in research on Pakistan following the 2010 floods, in which religious narratives played a role in making sense of events (Ali, Riaz, and Ahmed 2024; Aijazi and Panjwani 2015; Ahmad 2019). These religious narratives can be seen as "key sites of agency" wherein government, international policy, or NGO responses may be limited in their ability to make sense of climate impacts (Aijazi and Panjwani 2015).

3.4.3. Religious and spiritual losses

Religious and spiritual losses may be incurred due to climate change, especially where there are strong religious or spiritual ties to a specific place, community, or area of land (Zellentin 2010; Albro 2019, 2023; Tan 2018; Fair 2018). While it is a concern for indigenous groups and place-based religions, in particular, the religious and cultural losses associated with leaving home no doubt affect communities across the board. "Voluntary immobility," or the decision to remain, can constitute an important way for indigenous communities to retain agency in the face of religious and spiritual losses (Farbotko and McMichael 2019). Greater understanding of the spiritual and cultural factors that inform voluntary immobility are needed, as are frameworks that allow for conversations around these decisions to take place in constructive and sensitive ways (Farbotko 2018). In Tuvalu, Mortreux and Barnett (2009) found that the potential loss of place due to climate change presents an existential threat to those whose belief system intrinsically ties God, people, and place together. The provision of local religious institutions in a (post-)migration context may affect decision-making. In an Islamic Relief Pakistan report on climate migration, there is a suggestion that Hindus may find it more difficult to migrate as a result of climate change due to the lack of temples (Durrani 2021).

3.4.4. (In)tangible support from (local) faith actors

Local faith actors are highlighted as providing support for people displaced due to climate change, both in terms of intangible (spiritual or psychosocial) and tangible (material) support. (Praag and Ou-Salah 2024). Despite limited research on their role in this specific area, we know from other areas of research the role that local faith actors play. In LAC, for example, CELAM (2023) has mapped a network of churches offering support to refugees and migrants. Scholars have found faith actors to be key in disaster risk reduction and response (Ngin et al. 2020; Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2019), and they have highlighted how faith communities become sites of resilience in the face of climate change (Bock 2022; Carroll 2022).

In their research on climate mobility programming, Huang and Le Coz (2024) found that solutions with "community buy-in" tend to be more sustainable. Engaging with local networks to respond to climate migration is critical and faith actors may provide support in advocating for and developing these responses.

3.4.5. Faith-based advocacy

Faith actors also play a role in advocating for greater legal and rights-based protections for climate migrants internationally. The Church World Service (CWS 2022), for example, submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants calling for the rights of climate migrants to be recognized. Faith actors may also have an important communicative role in climate migration and showing solidarity with those displaced by climate change (Praag and Ou-Salah 2024). Sakellari (2024, 9–10) argues that communication about climate migration must reflect the "complexities of human mobility decisions", the rights of communities, and the important role of local factors including "governance, tradition, culture, and access to decision-making." Given faith actors' longstanding engagement with climate justice discourses and their well-established ability to weave together themes of morality, spirituality, and religious narratives with issues of human rights, justice, climate change, and to mediate between international debates and local concerns, they seem well-placed to fulfil this communicative role. The need for interfaith collaboration and support for climate migrants in a post-migration context may also be supported by (local) faith actors who can lay the groundwork needed to support displaced people (Ruíz 2012; Castro 2019).

3.4.6. Practitioner responses

Practitioners are key actors in engaging with and responding to climate migration, either by incorporating climate migration into programmes of work or conducting research on climate migration. There have been several reports on climate migration published by FBOs, such as Islamic Relief Pakistan, World Vision Southeast Asia, Caritas, and the Church World Service, that tend to focus on the lived experiences of people displaced by climate change (Fuys et al. 2021; Caritas Internationalis 2023; Durrani 2021). Although these reports often provide rich case studies of the lived experiences of climate migration, greater attention to the specific roles of local faith actors and the religious and spiritual discourses that inform experiences of climate migration would be a significant complement.

3.4.7. Barriers to climate migration

In some cases, religion may act as a barrier to climate migration. Religious or spiritual ties to a particular place may make it difficult or impossible to leave without incurring

significant spiritual losses, especially for indigenous peoples, and may result in voluntary immobility (Bergmann 2024; Farbotko and McMichael 2019; Farbotko 2018). Deterministic religious or spiritual beliefs about anthropogenic climate change might lead to a denial of climate risks (Gagaeolo, Hemstock, and Price 2020; Fair 2018). Migration may also be limited in cases where the area people are migrating to has limited religious provision or may result in inter-religious tension (Durrani 2021; Trotta and Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2022). Awareness of these barriers, and accommodation of non-migration decisions for religious or spiritual reasons, is seen as key to developing sensitive policies around climate migration (Praag and Ou-Salah 2024).

4 KEY GAPS AND QUESTIONS EMERGING FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The findings show there is limited research on the nexus between religion and climate migration, and there is a need for more research on how religion or faith shape lived experiences of climate migration, and on the role(s) local faith actors (already) play in supporting and engaging with people displaced due to climate change.

The **following questions** are important to consider in research and practices on faith and climate migration:

- How do religious or spiritual narratives, beliefs, or practices shape the lived experiences of climate migration?
- How is climate migration understood by local faith actors, and are there regional or religious differences? To what extent are global debates on **terminology**, **scope**, and **legal provision** relevant to migration processes, rights, and protection?
- How do local faith actors perceive, engage, and support **people displaced by climate change**? Is climate migration seen as different to other forms of migration or displacement?
- How are the **lived experiences** of local faith actors included in **global advocacy** and **policy debates** and **decision-making**?
- What religious or spiritual **losses** may be incurred due to climate migration?

5

Regional Experience from Listening Dialogues in South Asia, East Africa and Latin America

5.1 South Asia

About the listening dialogue

The South Asia listening dialogue held on 13 February 2025 brought together 18 participants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India. Organized by JLI in partnership with Christian Aid, this session served as an open and inclusive space to explore the intersection of faith and climate migration, drawing on a preliminary literature review and prioritizing voices from frontline communities. Participants shared firsthand accounts of how climate events—such as cyclones, floods, and droughts displaced families, and discussed the cultural, spiritual, and practical dimensions of these movements. Faith leaders, humanitarian actors, and community representatives highlighted the spiritual beliefs of such upheaval.

Key Themes

The Rich Role of Religion and Faith Actors: Across South Asia, religious narratives framed participants' understanding of displacement. For example, references to sacred texts provided moral frameworks that helped communities make sense of loss and motivated collective action to support affected families. Institutional guidance from mosques issuing relief directives to temples organizing shelter demonstrated both long-standing traditions of care and innovative adaptations to new challenges.

Support and Advocacy: Local faith actors offered immediate aid, food, shelter, and medical referrals, often reaching remote areas before secular agencies. They also served as intermediaries in negotiations with local authorities, advocating for legal recognition of climate migrants and ensuring that relief packages included religious dietary needs and gender-sensitive provisions. Legal recognition is important because it grants climate displaced individuals with a formal status which fills a legal void that otherwise would leave them unprotected.

Case Studies and Research: Reports by Islamic Relief Pakistan, World Vision Southeast Asia, and Caritas highlight community-driven models, such as mosque-based kitchens set up during floods and temple networks coordinating crop distribution. Yet participants noted a need to document refugee testimonies systematically and capture the full range of spiritual practices like collective prayers and ritual purification—that sustained mental well-being.

Challenges and barriers

Faith as a Barrier: Strong spiritual ties to ancestral lands sometimes discouraged relocation, even when environmental risks intensified. Deterministic beliefs, such as interpreting disasters as divine will, can lead some individuals to resist evacuation orders. Additionally, inadequate religious infrastructure in host regions and occasional inter-religious tensions complicated efforts to secure safe passage and equitable aid distribution.

Cross-cutting themes

Gender: Women bore the brunt of displacement challenges, facing hurdles in accessing relief sites that lacked separate sanitation or safe spaces. Conversely, male migration patterns left women as de facto community leaders, a role not always recognized by formal response mechanisms.

Climate-Induced Conflict: Competition over water and grazing lands sparked local disputes. Faith leaders in pastoralist communities stepped in to mediate, using shared spiritual values to resolve resource conflicts and restore cooperation between groups.

Trends Gaps Outstanding Questions

Research Gaps: Literature remains skewed toward rapid-onset disasters, with limited insight into slow-onset phenomena like the salinization of farmland. Few studies capture how faith-based healing rituals support resilience over prolonged periods of resource stress.

Outstanding Questions: How do specific theological narratives influence people's decision to stay or to migrate? What role can faith institutions play in documenting climate histories through oral traditions and sacred archives?

Roles and contributions of faith actors

Mosques, temples, Gurdwaras, and Churches located in areas experiencing extreme weather, and even in conflict contexts, play an important role in the provision of immediate relief and shelter. In faith based communities, there are so many examples of local communities taking shelter and seeking relief from these organizations. Congregation members and Mosque welfare societies provide round the clock care, including spiritual care, to help people cope with this upheaval. Faith plays an important role in building resilient communities.

Muslim faith leaders provide faith-inspired psychosocial support, helping communities cope with loss and trauma through collective practices such as Salah for Tauba (prayers for forgiveness). This group prayer serves as both a means of expressing guilt and seeking spiritual support from Allah, creating a sense of communal solidarity and encouraging resilience during hardship. These practices offer emotional healing and strengthen psychological resilience through spiritual connection.

Case studies and examples

Islamic Relief Pakistan:
Documented both material outreach and faith-based interventions, such as Quran recitations in flood camps that led to a sense of wellbeing.

Post-2010 Floods in Pakistan:
Communities cited specific verses from the Quran to interpret events, while local imams coordinated land reclamation efforts.

Pastoralist Communities in India and Bangladesh:
Spiritual calendars guided seasonal migrations, and elders invoked ancestral rituals to bless herds before departure.

These examples illustrate how faith-based approaches merge spiritual wisdom with practical actions, reinforcing the critical roles of religious institutions in climate resilience and humanitarian response.

Strengths

Anchored in deep trust, faith networks mobilized resources rapidly and sustained long-term engagement. Religious authority lent moral weight to advocacy efforts.

Challenges

Fragmented coordination across faith groups, limited data on intangible practices, and minimal investment in capacity building weakened overall impact.

Opportunities

Expand training on climate science for faith leaders, develop standardized documentation tools for spiritual interventions, and convene interfaith councils focused on climate adaptation.

Literature review: regional-relevant resources

Research tends to focus on internal, rather than international, migration (Mueller, Gray, and Kosec 2014; Lohano 2018; Kamal 2023; Makki et al. 2024; Jolly and Ahmad 2019)

Religion frames responses to and experiences of rapid-onset climate change impacts e.g., post-2010 floods in Pakistan 2010, post-2014 landslides in Nepal, post-2007 cyclone in Bangladesh (Ali, Riaz, and Ahmed 2024; Aijazi and Panjwani 2015; Ahmad 2019; Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2019)

Faith-based narratives can shape perceptions of climate migrants in a post-migration context (Lujala et al. 2020; Castellano, Dolšak, and Prakash 2021; Chakrabarty and Jha 2022; Narang 2017).

Religious or spiritual beliefs, narratives, and community ties may affect decisions to migrate (see studies from coastal regions in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Northern India (Ahmed and Eklund 2021; Mallick, Rogers, and Sultana 2022; Frömming and Reichel 2010))

Migration due to climate-induced conflict is an increasingly pressing theme for the region (Makki et al. 2024; Malji, Obana, and Hopkins 2022), but there is little documentation on how faith actors are (already) responding.

Conclusion

The South Asia listening dialogue underscored the urgency of capturing faith-based responses in academic and policy research. It highlighted the need for methodologies that respect oral histories, preserve ritual practices, and integrate slow-onset challenges. Strengthening partnerships between researchers and faith institutions will enrich evidence and ensure culturally grounded solutions.

5.2 East Africa

About the listening dialogue

The East Africa listening dialogue brought together 25 participants, including faith actors, community leaders, humanitarian experts, and academic researchers, from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Somalia. Hosted by JLI in partnership with regional faith networks, the session comprised plenary lectures, thematic breakout groups, and participatory mapping exercises. Attendees reflected on findings from an initial literature review, shared field experiences of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities, and co-developed priorities for research and practice.

Key Themes

Faith as First Responder: In remote areas, churches, mosques, and traditional shrines often serve as the only immediate support structures. Congregations mobilize volunteers to distribute food, blankets, and first-aid, sometimes before formal aid agencies arrive. Faith actors coordinate with local NGOs to avoid duplication and ensure the cultural appropriateness of relief.

Spiritual Meaning-Making: Participants described how climate events are understood through beliefs in ancestral guardianship of land, divine moral tests, or ecological stewardship mandates. Such frameworks inform communal rituals-carried out in places of worship or sacred groves, that reaffirm social cohesion and foster collective healing.

Peacebuilding in Conflict Settings: Drought-induced scarcity has heightened tensions over water and grazing routes. Faith leaders report mediating intercommunity disputes by organizing joint prayer ceremonies, invoking shared ethical teachings, and negotiating traditional rites that restore trust and equitable resource sharing.

Challenges and barriers

Resource Constraints: Many faith-based organizations operate with limited budgets and lack dedicated staff for monitoring, evaluation, or documentation. This constrains their ability to capture best practices, secure donor funding, or scale up successful interventions.

Policy Marginalization: Despite deep community reach, faith actors are frequently excluded from national adaptation planning, humanitarian clusters, and climate policy

dialogues. This exclusion limits their access to funding streams and formal platforms where strategic decisions on resource allocation are made. This sidelining also puts a limit on the extent to which policies actually reflect local needs and faith sensitivities.

Fragmented Coordination: Interfaith collaboration remains ad hoc; there is no consistent forum for multi-denominational faith groups to exchange lessons learned or coordinate responses across borders and crises.

Cross-cutting themes

Gender Dynamics: Women often spearhead local relief committees, managing the distribution of food and water, yet they remain underrepresented in decision-making roles. Barriers include cultural norms limiting women's leadership and a lack of safe spaces in faith settings.

Technology and Innovation: Adoption of early warning systems, SMS-based alerts, and social media varies. Where mobile connectivity is strong, faith actors have piloted digital platforms to mobilize congregations, share weather forecasts, and coordinate resilience training.

Trends Gaps Outstanding Questions

Research Gaps: Current research emphasizes rapid-onset hazards (floods, cyclones). There are less resources available on slow-onset processes (desertification, soil degradation). Literature also concentrates on Christian and Muslim traditions, leaving indigenous spiritual practices under-documented.

Outstanding Questions: How can faith actors integrate traditional ecological knowledge with scientific adaptation strategies? What models of interfaith governance effectively bridge local and national responses to climate migration? How might digital tools be co-designed with faith communities to enhance real-time collaboration?

Roles and contributions of faith actors

Emergency Relief: Places of worship are repurposed as temporary shelters. Volunteers from congregations form relief committees that liaise with health clinics and water-trucking services.

Pastoral and Spiritual Support: Rituals, such as collective prayers, water-blessing ceremonies, and the recitation of sacred texts, serve as psychosocial interventions, enabling communities to process trauma and foster hope.

Advocacy and Environmental Stewardship: Faith institutions lead tree-planting campaigns, clean-water initiatives, and climate education programs. By leveraging their moral authority, they can lobby local governments to adopt faith-informed adaptation policies.

Case studies and examples

Pokot Community, Kenya:
Joint peace-making ceremonies, combining Christian hymns and indigenous blessings, helped create the trust needed to renegotiate shared grazing agreements during drought cycles.

Maasai Pastoralists in Northern Tanzania:
Elders conducted drought-prediction rites based on seasonal bird migrations, then guided herd movements aligned with ritual calendars, demonstrating synergies between spiritual practice and environmental adaptation.

Interfaith Digital Hub, Uganda:
A pilot platform enabled Catholic, Muslim, and traditional faith leaders to share situational updates via SMS and coordinate cross-district relief convoys, reducing response times by 30 per cent.

Strengths

Trusted faith networks mobilize rapidly, sustain long-term engagement, and confer moral legitimacy to adaptation efforts. Their embeddedness in local culture ensures both relevance and resilience.

Challenges

Limited funding, policy exclusion, and uneven technological access hinder impact and scalability.

Opportunities

Establish formal interfaith councils for climate adaptation, co-develop digital documentation tools with communities, secure policy seats for faith representatives, and invest in gender-inclusive leadership training within faith institutions.

Literature review: regional-relevant resources

Migration is already common: rural-to-rural (seasonal, or for better farming land) and rural-to-urban (work or educational opportunities) (Ofori et al. 2023; Leal Filho et al. 2023).

Faith actors play an important role in supporting refugees, but there is less research on climate migrants specifically (Stoddard and Marshall 2015; Munyao 2021).

Religion and faith actors may play a peacebuilding and sense-making role in response to climate-induced conflict (Tarusarira 2022; Welty 2014).

Religion and spirituality frame people's experiences of climate migration (Awinia 2020; Ombati 2021). Studies of pastoralists in Tanzania explored how climatic changes were described in spiritual or religious terms.

Faith leaders and faith-based organisations play an important role in raising environmental awareness (Islamic Relief Worldwide, n.d.; Mucunguzi, Musiime, and Ogola 2021).

Migration outcomes vary: migration may not deliver the expected social, economic, and environmental benefits (Tubi and Israeli 2024).

There is an urgent need for multi-method research that integrates ethnographic study of sacred rituals, quantitative tracking of relief outcomes, and policy analysis of faith–state partnerships.

Conclusion

Gaps and Future Research Avenues: The East Africa listening dialogue underscored the imperative of documenting diverse faith-based responses, from ancestral rites to digital innovations, and bridging them with policy frameworks. There is an urgent need for multi-method research that integrates ethnographic study of sacred rituals, quantitative tracking of relief outcomes, and policy analysis of faith–state partnerships.

5.3 Latin America and the Caribbean

About the listening dialogue

The listening dialogue on the role of faith actors in climate migration in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) brought together participants from Ecuador, Chile, Mexico, and Colombia. Selected participants from the United States were also invited and attended the LAC listening dialogue due to their academic and professional expertise. Participants included academics, grassroots practitioners, religious leaders, and researchers with experience in human rights, child protection, migration, peacebuilding, and faith-based interventions. Christian Aid and the JLI convened the session as part of a broader evidence-building initiative. Participants reflected on lived experiences and regional insights, as well as findings from a preliminary literature review. Despite fewer participants than anticipated, the discussion was rich, and participants expressed interest in continued engagement through a future session.

Key Themes

Rich Role of Religion and Faith Actors: Faith leaders were recognized as both first responders and long-term companions for climate-displaced communities. Participants highlighted how spiritual and emotional support, in addition to material aid, fosters holistic resilience. Religious traditions, including Catholic, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant faith practices, help communities process displacement-related trauma and build hope. Faith actors are also advocates for systemic change, mobilizing communities and promoting values of justice, dignity, and stewardship.

Support and Advocacy: Religious institutions provide humanitarian aid and mobilize community-based support networks. Participants emphasized that faith-based actors sustain community life in displacement and serve as advocates for economic and environmental justice. They frequently work in policy vacuums, filling roles that state and international actors leave unmet.

Case Studies and Research: Examples shared during the listening dialogue included the Catholic Church's pastoral guidelines for climate migrants, interfaith solidarity with Muslim diasporas in Brazil, and Indigenous responses to displacement rooted in spiritual traditions. The Latin America Council of Churches, ACT Alliance, and the Scalabrini International Migration Network were cited as key actors providing support across the region.

Challenges and barriers

Faith as an Unrecognized Actor: While faith actors provide critical support, their contributions often go undocumented or are absorbed into larger policy narratives. Limited funding, weak coordination, and insufficient documentation capacity reduce their visibility and ability to reach more beneficiaries. Participants also discussed conceptual challenges around defining climate migrants and called for more localized legal and policy definitions.

Underrepresentation and Resource Constraints: Research on climate migration in LAC often omits faith-based perspectives, especially those of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Faith leaders face resource constraints that limit their participation in formal policy spaces. Participants also noted a lack of communication and collaboration across regions as a missed opportunity to better understand the nexus between faith and climate migration.

Cross-cutting themes

Gender: While not extensively discussed, participants acknowledged that women in faith spaces play key roles in community support but are often excluded from formal leadership. This limits their access to training, advocacy spaces, and research participation.

Geopolitical Shifts and Climate-Induced Conflict: Participants noted that current poly-crises, including COVID-19, economic instability, and local conflicts, exacerbate climate migration. Displacement is driven not just by natural disasters but by systemic inequalities. Faith actors often step into these gaps, advocating for more equitable development and environmental policies.

Trends Gaps Outstanding Questions

Research Gaps: The literature review highlighted that, although LAC has pioneered rights-based legal frameworks for environmental displacement (e.g., Brazil Declaration, Ecuador's Human Mobility Law), the role of faith actors remains under-studied. Research is predominantly published in English and often excludes Indigenous and Afro-Latino perspectives.

Lived Experiences and Religious Narratives: The spiritual and cultural dimensions of climate migration, such as the disintegration of community, loss of sacred land, and spiritual displacement, are rarely documented in mainstream research. Participants agreed that these intangible losses are central to community well-being and deserve further study.

Legal and Policy Recognition: Participants called for the inclusion of faith actors in national and regional migration policy processes. There was concern that climate migration terminology lacks clarity and that regional frameworks could do more to reflect the lived realities of displaced people.

Roles and contributions of faith actors

Immediate Relief and Support: Faith institutions provide emergency shelter, food, and emotional care. Churches, mosques, temples, and Indigenous spiritual spaces often serve as safe havens during disasters.

Long-term Resilience: Faith leaders promote environmental stewardship and mobilize community solidarity to build long-term resilience. Their teachings provide moral framing around care for creation and communal responsibility.

Advocacy and Policy Influence: Participants noted that faith actors are engaging in policy dialogue, though inconsistently. Some organizations advocate for legal recognition of climate migrants and highlight systemic injustices contributing to displacement.

Education and Awareness: Religious leaders educate communities about climate change through a moral and ethical lens. They frame environmental challenges as spiritual responsibilities, helping communities adapt with dignity.

Case studies and examples

The Catholic Church in Colombia and Pastoral Guidelines:
Offering structured support for displaced communities and advocating at national levels.

Indigenous and Afro-descendant Traditions:
Using spiritual frameworks to articulate experiences of loss and displacement.

American University Research Centre on Religion and Displacement in LACRO:
Supporting local scholars to produce evidence on faith and migration dynamics.

Strengths

Faith actors effectively mobilize communities, provide critical support during crises, and frame climate issues through compelling moral narratives. Their local trust and reach make them indispensable in addressing both emergency response and long-term adaptation.

Challenges

Faith actors face constraints related to funding, recognition, and coordination. Their work is often excluded from formal planning and underrepresented in research. Limited documentation practices reduce their visibility.

Opportunities

Invest in capacity-building, strengthen interfaith and regional networks, and ensure inclusion of faith-based perspectives in climate policy and programming. Create spaces, such as regional learning hubs, for continuous evidence generation and exchange. Amplify the role of Indigenous and Afro-descendant faith traditions as critical sources of wisdom and resilience.

Literature review: regional-relevant resources

The region has played a significant role in efforts to broaden the definition of refugee to include environmental migrants from a human rights perspective (Albro 2019; Rathod 2020; Gomes 2014; Alonso 2020; Mellado, Simione, and Soares 2022), e.g. **Brazil's 2014 Declaration and Plan of Action for Latin America**, **Bolivia's 2013 Migration Law**, **Ecuador's 2017 Human Mobility Law**, **Peru's 2017 Migration Law**, the **2010 Cancun Agreements** that led directly to the **2012 Nansen Initiative on environmental migration**, and Mexico's 2004 Declaration amongst others.

Religious institutions and faith actors play an important role in supporting refugees in post-migration contexts and advocating for their rights at the international level (CELAM 2023; Scalabrini Migration Studies Centres 2018; Castro 2024)

The regional focus often centres on the Catholic Church, though there is history of ecumenical, multi- and interfaith responses to climate change and migration (Vatican 2021; Caritas Internationalis 2023; CONIC 2022; Berry and Albro 2018; Salguero Fagoaga 2024; UNEP 2019a)

There is a growing body of research on indigenous communities and Afro-Latino religious traditions, which have contributed significantly to making visible the intangible losses caused by climate migration (Albro 2019; 2023; J. Bergmann 2024)

Conclusion

The Latin America listening dialogue underscored how important it is for any future research in the region to document and systematically integrate complex perspectives that can be brought forward by faith actors, highlighting their contributions to climate-migration research and policy. Building on the extensive literature review, the dialogue found that local religious leaders, Indigenous spiritual networks, and grassroots faith-based programmes frequently deploy innovative, culturally rooted interventions. For example, temple-run feeding kitchens, community purification rites, and church-led trauma counselling remain invisible in most formal assessments and academic efforts. The literature review highlighted contested terms such as “climate migrant,” “refugee,” “displaced person,” which largely fail to account for those whose mobility decisions are shaped by slow-onset stressors linked to drought or salinization, or “voluntary immobility” rooted in sacred-land attachments. During the listening dialogue participants called for mixed-method, culturally sensitive participatory protocols that combine quantitative mapping with ethnographic collection of oral histories, ritual calendars and spiritual-care practices, to capture both tangible outputs and the intangible losses i.e. severed sacred ties, fragmentation of communal rituals, that drive and sustain displacement.

To operationalize these findings, the group agreed on the need to establish a regional learning hub that would house case studies, multi-lingual methodological toolkits, policy briefs, and interactive training modules. This hub would serve as a focal point for interfaith collaboration, enabling mosques, churches, temples, and traditional councils to share best practices, harmonize locally grounded definitions, and co-create policy guidance that weaves spiritual dimensions into national and sub-national adaptation strategies.

5.4 Regional Contrasts and Commonalities in Faith-Based Responses

Across LAC, South Asia, and East Africa faith actors consistently appear as frontline responders, providing material aid, as well as spiritual and emotional support to strengthen community resilience to climate-induced displacement. In LAC, Indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders and organizations provide holistic accompaniment which includes offering pastoral and socio emotional support alongside food and shelter, and advocate for justice and policy change even in areas formal frameworks are lacking. Unfortunately, these contributions often go undocumented and under-resourced. Similarly, in South Asia, mosques and temples rapidly mobilize community kitchens, shelters, and medical referrals, mobilizing sacred narratives that foster collective meaning-making, yet they also struggle with fragmented coordination and limited documentation capacity. In East Africa, churches, mosques, and traditional shrines repurpose worship spaces for emergency relief and employ rituals to support migrants, even as they face policy marginalization and uneven technological access. Nevertheless, the specific functions and influence of faith actors vary according to religious tradition, geography, severity of the environmental crisis, and policy context.

In LAC, a comparatively advanced legal environment, which includes human mobility laws in countries like Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, allows faith actors to engage in advocacy and policy dialogue in a more formal manner, including interfaith networks advancing rights-based protection. South Asian faith communities rely heavily on scriptural teachings often invoking the moral imperatives found in sacred texts, for example, to interpret displacement and motivate solidarity and empathy. In East Africa, faith actors integrate traditional ecological knowledge through drought-prediction rites and joint peace-making ceremonies to mediate resource conflicts. Other innovative experiences include interfaith digital hubs to coordinate relief across districts.

Across all three regions, faith actors consistently have three interconnected roles: **a) spiritual care**, **b) psychosocial support**, and **c) material assistance**, especially where state services are weak, absent, or inefficient. This “tripartite bridge” model highlights how communities first co-construct meaning and solidarity through rituals and reflective spaces; provide group-based psychosocial interventions (for example through prayer circles and trauma-informed dialogues); and finally, by mobilising tangible resources (food, shelter, referrals). These three dimensions reinforce one another to sustain community resilience.

This “tripartite bridge” model highlights how communities first co-construct meaning and solidarity through rituals and reflective spaces; provide group-based psychosocial interventions (for example through prayer circles and trauma-informed dialogues); and finally, by mobilising tangible resources (food, shelter, referrals).

6 RELEVANT INSIGHTS

Addressing power dynamics among faith actors

The evidence collected and the experience conducting the listening dialogue sessions identified persistent structural inequities within faith-based engagement, which reinforces the relevance of JLI's and Christian Aid's call for intentional equity in partnerships, research, funding allocations, and representation.

Institutional and grassroots divides

Large, established religious bodies and research institutions continue to dominate policy dialogues, interfaith forums, and research projects while community-level faith-based organizations responsible for much of the on-the-ground peacebuilding, humanitarian, and social support remain sidelined by bureaucratic barriers, funding, recognition, and limited visibility. Funding patterns reflect this imbalance: institutional actors secure more of the available donor resources, leaving grassroots initiatives reliant on modest small-scale donations. JLI's Guiding Principles for a Fair & Equitable approach call for measures to redistribute visibility toward local faith-based organisations through support for locally-led research with proactive recruitment and enablement of diverse leaders into policymaking, advisory and convening roles which would help secure representation and leadership for smaller or historically marginalised partners. Other measures could include maintenance of free and sponsored membership routes to decrease financial barriers and dedicated resources such as translation-interpretation, travel, and fair consultancy fees, to ensure more equitable participation and visibility in decision-making events. During recruitment and mapping efforts it became clear that it was easier to confirm participation from large organizations and well-known academic institutions despite conscious efforts to reach out to local actors.

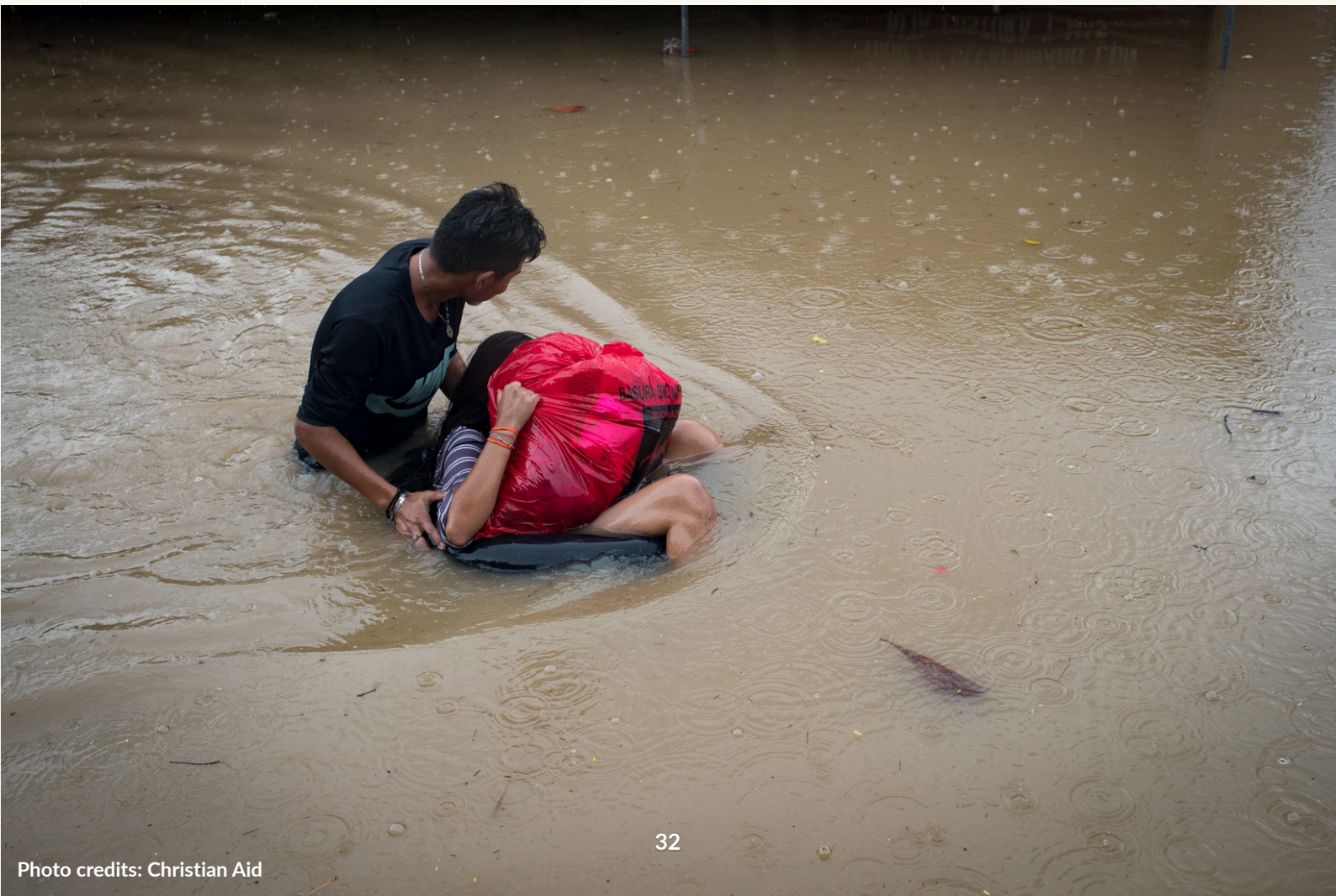
Gender gaps in leadership

Despite women providing the majority of local faith-based support, they occupy only a small fraction of executive roles within interfaith councils and organizations. Their participation and representation in the listening dialogues was less than that of males. The application of JLI's "3E Framework" (Educate, Engage, Empower) through tailored leadership training and cross-denominational advocacy coalitions could help redress these structural imbalances.

Inclusion of marginalized voices

Youth activists and minority faith communities frequently encounter tokenistic inclusion or are excluded by monolingual forums and rigid protocols. **JLI's Fair and Equitable Approach** calls for co-designed agendas, multilingual facilitation, and proportional speaking rights to ensure that more stakeholders can contribute meaningfully to both analysis and action. **Christian Aid's co-creation guide** calls for the adoption of methodologies to decolonize development and humanitarian assistance by shifting power dynamics and highlighting community knowledge throughout research processes.

Collectively, these findings point to the imperative of equity-centred reforms: institutionalizing grassroots representation, dismantling gender barriers, and embedding genuine inclusion of marginalized actors across all stages of faith-based programming.



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7 Practical Recommendations Responding to Climate-Induced Migration

These recommendations are informed by the literature review and the listening dialogues in South Asia, East Africa, and Latin America & the Caribbean.

For Religious Leaders

- **Reframe climate migration through theological and cultural narratives**

Religious leaders can reframe climate-induced migration as a humanitarian crisis but also as a crisis of profound spiritual and moral significance. Across diverse geographical regions, theological and cultural narratives are already helping communities make sense of displacement. In South Asia, teachings on suffering and compassion are frequently invoked to interpret crises and mobilize solidarity. Elsewhere, environmental stewardship is emphasized in East Africa as a spiritual duty that can galvanize local action. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Indigenous and Afro-descendant traditions provide ancestral frameworks to interpret loss and movement, complementing Christian pastoral responses. From such theological motifs, exile, prophetic journeying, sacred obligation to care for creation, religious leaders can offer frameworks that help restore agency, dignity, and hope to displaced communities and refugees.

- **Leverage moral legitimacy**

Faith actors' deep-rooted moral authority and community trust can act as a powerful lever for positive advocacy. By invoking this moral legitimacy, which is grounded in their spiritual role, ethical leadership, and historical presence, religious leaders can more effectively influence policy debates on migration and climate adaptation. Governments and donors are more responsive when advocacy emerges from institutions perceived as legitimate and representative of local values. Elevating this recommendation can guide stakeholders to partner strategically with faith-based networks for rights-based outcomes.

- **Highlight intangible dimensions of loss**

Spiritual dislocation, the severing of ties to sacred places, and the fragmentation of community identity are invisible impacts of climate migration. In South Asia, deep grief accompanies forced separation from ancestral land that holds religious meaning; in East Africa, participants consistently pointed to the spiritual toll of displacement that is absent from formal policy discussions. In LAC, communities described the erosion of cultural and spiritual life, particularly among displaced Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, as central to the trauma of climate-induced mobility. Faith actors, in their pastoral, liturgical,

and public roles, can help to both highlight and address these intangible losses, offering spaces for meaning making and renewal.

- **Document and give visibility to faith engagement**

Faith actors' contributions to climate-induced displacement support are often undocumented or subsumed under broader government or NGO initiatives, which was a critical gap identified across all regions. In LAC, for example, the lack of capacity to systematically document local efforts, whether spiritual, psychosocial, material, or advocacy-related, was mentioned as a core obstacle.

Strengthening mechanisms for local documentation and narrative-sharing would enhance recognition of faith-based responses and provide valuable models and insights for wider replication and policy engagement.

This includes capturing grassroots innovations, informal support networks, and interfaith collaborations that are often hidden from institutional reporting.

- **Deepen cross-sector and interfaith collaboration**

Religious leaders can help coordinate holistic responses to climate migration by engaging across faith traditions and working with humanitarian and policy actors. In all regions, the need for deeper inclusion of faith voices in formal planning and advocacy platforms was consistently highlighted. Strengthening these alliances can help unify moral messaging, improve local response capacity, and amplify the voices of communities.

- **Co-creation and partnerships**

Faith actors should be involved as co-researchers and partners, not just subjects, in the design and implementation of studies and programs. Strengthening networks and coordination platforms like the East Africa Learning Hub can support and strengthen mutual learning, evidence generation, and joint advocacy. Partnerships between faith and secular actors, including universities, NGOs, and government agencies, are vital for inclusive programming.

- **Strengthen gender sensitive engagement**

Climate migration has gendered impacts that communities of faith and their leadership must intentionally address. Women are frequently excluded from leadership and lack access to critical information, despite their increased exposure to the consequences of climate change. Faith actors are encouraged to support women, but most importantly, engage with them as leaders to shape more inclusive and just community responses.

- **Invest in knowledge, training, advocacy, and exchange (prioritizing capacity building in climate migration knowledge and advocacy)**

To navigate the intersections of climate, migration, and spirituality, faith actors should make sustained investments in peer learning, advocacy skills, and technical knowledge. In all regions, gaps in technical expertise, legal understanding, and digital tools were noted as limiting the visibility and effectiveness of local faith responses. Building bridges between faith-based knowledge and other disciplines (psychology, law, health, environmental studies, etc) can strengthen leadership and impact.

- **Amplifying rituals and sacred spaces as safe spaces**

As climate change disrupts lives and spiritual geographies, there is a need for rituals and sacred spaces that help communities mourn and process the changes and challenges they face.

While spiritual and emotional care is already offered in many faith settings, these practices could be further amplified and adapted to meet the specific needs of climate-displaced populations.

In South Asia and East Africa, community leaders provide pastoral care that could evolve into formalized rituals of collective mourning and hope. In LAC, Indigenous ceremonies already serve as powerful spaces of cultural resilience, resistance, and resilience. Religious leaders can innovate or adapt liturgical and pastoral tools to help communities manage loss while providing them with a shared identity and sense of purpose.

- **Establish "faith mobility companions"**

Inspired by traditions of sanctuary and pilgrimage, faith actors could form translocal networks such as "faith mobility companions," committed to spiritually, emotionally, and practically accompany people on the move. Real-world parallels already exist. For example, in South Asia, coordinated support by temples, mosques, and churches across regions reflects informal versions of this model. In East Africa, interfaith action has played a critical role in sustaining displaced populations. In LAC, networks like the Scalabrinians and the Latin American Council of Churches offer structured models of accompaniment. Institutionalizing these kinds of partnerships could improve continuity of care and belonging across migratory journeys.

For International Non-Governmental Organizations and Policymakers

- **Reframe climate migration through cultural and theological lenses**

Climate-related migration is more than a material or environmental challenge as it also carries deep cultural dimensions.

> **Policymakers and INGOs must recognize that theological and cultural narratives and metaphors shape how communities understand and respond to displacement.**

In South Asia, teachings on compassion mobilize community support, in East Africa, environmental responsibility is understood as a sacred duty, and in LAC, Indigenous and Afro-descendant traditions are frameworks of ancestral connection, dignity, and resistance. These narratives are powerful tools that can help restore agency and dignity, while offering meaningful entry points for community-based programming and communication strategies.

- **Leverage the moral authority of faith actors for policy influence**

Faith actors tend to hold significant levels of trust and legitimacy at community levels, often more than that of the government or international institutions. Their continuous presence, leadership, and credibility can make them very effective advocates for climate justice and the rights of migrants. Policymakers and INGOs can proactively partner with these faith networks to advance accountability and strengthen the case for inclusive climate and migration responses. It is important not to instrumentalize these actors.

- **Document and elevate faith-based contributions**

The contributions that faith-based organizations make in climate migration contexts remain underreported and understudied which limits their integration into formal coordination mechanisms. INGOs and donors should invest in improved local documentation, narrative capture, and case study development to give more visibility to all the support faith actors provide (and promising practices they have developed).

- **Promote cross-sector and interfaith collaboration**

Faith leaders frequently act as conveners who can bring together actors from across religious traditions and sectors, thus shaping more coordinated responses to climate migration. INGOs and governments should support mechanisms and networks for interfaith dialogue and joint advocacy platforms. These partnerships can amplify local voices, community needs, and help overcome cycles of conflict.

- **Ensure faith actors are co-creators in policy and research**

Faith actors should be integrated as full partners, which means they must be considered as more than service providers. They must participate, as equal partners, in project conception and initiation, the design and implementation of research, programming, and policy development.

- **Prioritize gender-inclusive engagement in faith contexts**

Climate migration disproportionately burdens women yet they can frequently be excluded from formal leadership roles within faith communities. INGOs and policymakers should support efforts to engage women not only as beneficiaries but as leaders and knowledge holders.

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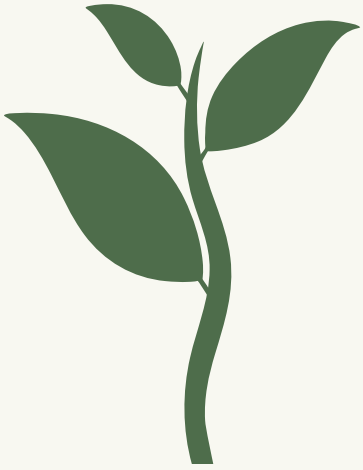

About the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities:
JLI is a learning network of researchers and practitioners that builds fair and equitable spaces to create and share evidence on religions in development and community work. JLI aims to strengthen partnerships between and amongst faith and non faith actors, internationally and locally.

About Christian Aid:
Christian Aid is an international charity united by hope with churches, organisations and people of all faiths and none, determined to fight poverty and respond to humanitarian emergencies.