



**World Council
of Churches**



Where Faith Speaks: WASH in religious institutions

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World Council of Churches - Ecumenical Water Network



Introduction of the WCC-EWN

A platform of Christian churches and organizations committed to SDG 6

- The WCC is a global fellowship of 350 Protestant and Orthodox churches in 110 countries representing **over half a billion Christians**.
- The Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) is the main expression of WCC's commitment to water justice.
- EWN is primarily engaged in advocacy for water justice within a human rights framework through the UN Human Rights Council, the UN HLPF, and other relevant global platforms
- Through its large network of FBOs, it also implements a number of WASH projects on the ground around the world.

1. Interface between WASH, development actors and religious institutions

- WASH is a key entry point to work in any communities for both the development actors or the FBOs
- Most FBOs are engaged in the WASH sector
- Use of toilet and hygiene practices are strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors
- Faith/religious institutions can contribute significantly to a better implementation/understanding of WASH
- More than 80% of world's population identify themselves with one or the other religion. Many of them might oblige to what their religious leaders say to them
- It is important for the development actors/governments to consult the religious leaders, so that the correct messaging is passed on to the communities through the religious leaders
- This is highly important during a crisis period, such as the COVID-19, But during non-crisis time, this partnership must continue

2. How do religious and cultural norms influence hygiene practices and cleanliness?

- Religions do not always promote cleanliness and hygiene, but the other way around
- E.g., immersing the dead bodies in the Holy river Ganges, as per the Hindu rituals
- Taking a bath every day before worshipping in Hindu rituals adds to hygiene and cleanliness
- **Leviticus 11:32-40** - details about clean and unclean when it comes to carcass of animals, It also details about what food to eat and what not to eat
- **Leviticus 15:1-15** - goes on to talk about being infected with some contagious diseases and how to isolate oneself and to wash hands, clothes, etc.

3. Success stories in working on WASH in religious institutions and using religious concepts for hygiene education

- **Ebola Epidemic:** in West Africa (2014) churches and religious institutions played a vital role in providing psycho-social support and care to the victims.
- **COVID-19:** WCC constantly in communication with its member churches through a number of guidelines in this regards: www.oikoumene.org/corona
- **Seven Weeks for Water**
- **Church hymn on toilets:** WCC observes World Toilet Day on 19 November, prepare special liturgies and biblical reflections on it.
- **NCA – Telethon clean water and sanitation to 1 million people**
- **ACT Alliance:** 3 billion USD every year for its humanitarian work, including WASH
- **Parameters of success for the FBOs in promoting WASH:** accompaniment, counselling, awareness raising, dismissing mis-information, access to resources, finances, infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, etc.

4. Challenges

- Sanitation, toilets are considered a subject of profanity, taboo and stigma. Churches have shied away from addressing this issue.
- India's Swatchh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission): Target to become ODF in 2019 ?
- GIWA (Global Interfaith WASH Alliance)
- WASH challenges not only around behavioural issues and related to stigma and taboos but also lack of resources.
- FBOs and religious institutions can partner with governments to help the communities for better WASH provisions.



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Thank you

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