



# Faith Leader Engagement for WASH

WASH is a significant part of World Vision's effort to enhance the well-being of children and communities around the world by addressing issues of poverty and injustice. Through WASH programmes, World Vision is privileged to serve and partner with communities in multiple faith contexts around the world. Eighty-five percent of the world's population is religious, and most of the world's poor communities tend to be very religious. Because World Vision is an openly Christian, faith-based organisation, its WASH programmes are uniquely positioned to engage effectively with the heart and spirituality of the communities it serves.

In many of the places where World Vision works, its WASH programs are distinctly successful because of intentional and effective engagement with the most trusted community leaders—many of whom are religious leaders from diverse Christian faith backgrounds and from Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu faiths. Local faith leaders are often the gate-keepers in their communities, and engaging them as advocates for WASH work can serve to facilitate needed WASH-related behaviour change in significant ways. While community members may not always listen to a government agent, or even a World Vision staff member, they often listen more carefully to respected faith leaders in their communities. This positions World Vision to engage in multi-faith environments, and serves to enhance its efforts in achieving long-lasting, positive changes in attitudes and behaviour relative to WASH practice.

Perhaps most important are the remarkable opportunities faith leader engagement presents for World Vision to sensitively demonstrate and articulate God's love and care for the communities it serves, and to build unity and needed bonds of trust in such diverse contexts.

# Utilising Faith Leader Engagement



Faith leaders' participation in WASH training is a major initial step in laying the foundation for needed behaviour change relative to WASH practice. Once trained in WASH, the leaders' engagement in their communities is a public affirmation for WASH efforts and provides unique and important opportunities for World Vision's identity and values to be articulated and publicly affirmed within the served communities.

World Vision aims to initiate WASH work in new communities by mobilising local faith leaders as advocates for WASH initiatives in their communities. World Vision first brings together local faith leaders for a few days to learn about the technical aspects of water and sanitation, and the science of good hygiene. The leaders are then invited to share about aspects of WASH from their own faith perspectives, which provides for a unique time of exchange and learning from one another. It also provides the opportunity for these faith leaders to reflect on how they can work together to enhance the health of their communities. Finally, the faith leaders develop action plans that detail how they will work to promote good WASH in their communities. They complete these days of training equipped with both the information and inspiration to effectively address their respective congregations on matters of hygiene, as well as collaborate with World Vision WASH staff in a range of WASH promotion efforts.

This Faith Leader Engagement training has been met with significant enthusiasm by a diverse array of faith leaders. Our WASH teams and local faith leaders learn that when we are intentional about bringing our respective knowledge and perspectives to the same table, trust and common ground can be established among people of diverse faith backgrounds, especially when united around a shared desire to impact the lives of vulnerable children. This, in turn, provides unique and strategic platform from which to do our work. It also provides a unique opportunity for World Vision to demonstrate its Christian identity and values among faith leaders of different persuasions and cultures in ways that are appropriate in, and sensitive to, the diverse milieus where we serve.

## Faith Leader Engagement in Action

Below are quotations from two Christian leaders and a Muslim imam that collectively highlight both the importance of and World Vision's success with engaging faith leaders in order to promote long-lasting, positive changes in attitudes and behaviour relative to WASH practice.



*“I was very satisfied with the two days of training in WASH for local faith leaders. I was not expecting this because before coming, I thought that there was nothing I could learn that I haven't known before. When I was chosen to represent my church, I was skeptical about coming. But, the training about water and health touched me deeply ...and I have learned new facts and ideas that I can use in radio broadcasts. I have now been teaching about water and health on the national radio for an entire year. As an illustration, we emphasize that people must be selective about good sources of water for drinking for their families and communities. Thanks to this World Vision training people can live longer now in Niger.”*  
-A community pastor who participated in a World Vision-sponsored WASH training in Niger for local pastors and imams

*“For the well-being and best interests of our community we must work together. When the faith leader takes the lead and talks about hygiene and sanitation, the people, or at least the congregation, will listen to him. We work with the holy scriptures, either the Quran or the Bible. The Christians work with the Bible and the Muslims work with the Quran. Then both groups reconvene to identify their commonalities and then we draft documents (plans) that will serve all mankind. It is important that faith leaders gather and brainstorm together, and it is important for the leaders of the different religions to collectively come together and work because dialogue is crucial to interfaith relations.”*  
-Imam Dr. Toure Boubacar at a West Africa regional WASH workshop, discussing the importance of imams and pastors coming together to discuss WASH

*“During the WASH workshop we had separate Christian and Muslim breakout sessions; and when we came together to present our work... (we discovered) the same challenges, the same issues and the same recommendations. And this process... was enriching for all of us. It has been very rewarding and encouraging (as a Christian pastor) to work with these Muslim leaders. And I wish to encourage my peer pastors to get more strongly engaged (in such interfaith work) because the lives of our daughters and sons do matter. It is true we differ in our religious practices, but as the saying goes ‘We don't have to be alike to love alike.’”*

-Rev. Sabo Batchiri, Secretary General of the Association of Evangelical Churches in Niger



**World Vision** 

*World Vision is a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.*