

JUNE 2022

POLICY BRIEF

Why Religious Literacy?

Input to Stockholm+50



Why Religious Literacy?

Religious actors and systems of beliefs are complex, dynamic; sometimes conservative, sometimes progressive. They often follow their own ethical drumbeat, not always heard by the secular bystander. The world is religious. A vast majority of the world's population, +80%, define themselves as adherents of a religion. Religious beliefs influence how people think, act, and understand the world. They are integrated into values, cultures, and social structures.

Religious literacy is the ability to understand how religious beliefs influence a society and its development. It refers to the ability to see and understand how religious beliefs, for better or worse, interact with other factors and agents in people's lives.

Religious literacy is essential to everyone who works with social change, regardless of whether they themselves live faith-based lives or not. Religious literacy will guide people so they can understand, navigate, and act in a relevant way in a complex world. We describe religious literacy as a necessary professional capacity for everyone working with people.

Religious actors bring essential contributions in facing our common human challenges as described in the Sustainable Development Goals.

They can contribute with existential meaning, ethical thinking, comfort, and hope. But equally important, they are agents formulating the ethical narratives with potential to create behavioural change within large parts of the world's population. They are extremely important development actors: owning land, managing funds, running education, healthcare and other social services. Religious actors are almost everywhere involved in development and shaping human life. Particularly among people living in poverty, and what is sometimes referred to as marginalized people, religious actors are present, are trusted, and carry knowledge of the situation.

Policymakers, trade and industry and civil society organisations need religious literacy:

- to understand and work closely with religious actors
- to be efficient change makers in cooperation with religious actors
- to reach common goals with religious actors
- to do their job well

When faith-based organisations were asked how they could contribute to climate justice prior to COP 26 they described **three overarching functions: mediating dialogue, advocating and protecting, and driving behavioural change.**

Knowledge forum of Religion and Development is Swedish faith-based network promoting religious literacy. Member organisations: ACT Church of Sweden, Diakonia, Islamic Relief Sweden, PMU and SMC-faith in Development. For further information please contact petter.jakobsson@smc.global

