

**The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) | Annual Forum and General Assembly of Members 2021**  
in Stellenbosch, South Africa | November 8-11, 2021

***Approving a 5-years strategy, new PaRD steering group and co-chairs, the Partnership focuses on “Becoming More Together”***

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Executive Summary**



The hybrid PaRD Annual Forum and General Assembly of Members (GAM) 2021 had over 100 participants, made-up of representatives from civil society, religious and faith-based actors, governments, multilaterals, and academia. Participants were evenly distributed

between in-person and online and showcased the true hybrid nature of the event – the new normal. The four-day event was held in accordance with COVID-19 protocols and with regular testing.

The South African Government representatives announced to endorse Bishop Sipuka’s request, that the government of South Africa join PaRD as an official member, before President Ramaphosa.

The in-coming PaRD steering group members were inaugurated, and members bid farewell to the outgoing steering group. Hazel M. D. Dixon, African Union Commission; Adam Phillips, USAID and Peter Prove, World Council of Churches, were named as new co-chairs.

The five-year strategic plan was approved and adopted ([download here](#)). The strategy will be the guiding document until 2026 and will be complemented by a work plan alongside indicators to measure progress. The PaRD Secretariat is mandated to begin work on an implementation plan.

The GAM reaffirmed its long-term engagement in four work-streams and updated PaRD members on its activities and progress. In the coming year, the work-streams will identify intersecting themes and find areas of joint collaborations. A food security working group, led by Peter Prove, WCC and Andrea Kaufmann, WVI, was created.

The Steering Group recognised the interest of PaRD members to consider cross-cutting topics. At the same time, it equally acknowledged the constraints in terms of money and resources available to work on these. Religious-based organisations (RBOs) and governments, including the Danish representatives, proposed to initiate an exchange on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). There was a consensus to develop a framework for guidance on how to address this cross-cutting topic and integrate it into the core SDG-oriented mandate of PaRD. The framework will specify contributing PaRD members’ engagement. It provides the foundation for two thematic pillars (1) sharing best practices and lessons learned, and (2) engaging, networking and identifying and resolving FoRB infringements. Following approval of the framework by the Steering Group, an invitation to join the FoRB initiative will be sent to all PaRD members.

## Introduction

At the closing of the 2019 GAM held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark in Copenhagen, the PaRD Steering Group gratefully accepted the invitation by PaRD member - Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust (CDDC Trust) - to hold the GAM 2020 in South Africa. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person GAM was postponed to 2021. One year later, the 2021 PaRD Annual Forum and General Assembly of Members (GAM) took place 8-11 November in Stellenbosch, South Africa. The event was organised by the PaRD Secretariat in collaboration with the National Religious Association for South Africa (NRASD), a subsidiary of the PaRD member CDDC Trust in South Africa.

The current 144 PaRD members and observers were invited to participate in the event virtually or in person. Over 100 participants, comprised of representatives from civil society, religious and faith-based actors, governments, multilaterals, and academia, participated in the event. GAM 2021 consisted of public sessions, PaRD-internal plenary sessions, where they worked on the strategic plan, meetings of the PaRD Steering Group and its sub-committees, PaRD work-streams and workgroups, parallel open forum sessions (where members presented their ongoing initiatives), and side events. All agenda items provided opportunities for discussion and mutual learning.

## Day 1 | November 8

The Annual Forum began with **welcoming remarks** by **Khushwant Singh**, the new Head of the PaRD Secretariat. Singh emphasised the special momentum in PaRD's evolution that the event represented. With a new five-year PaRD strategy developed in inclusive and respectful cooperation, while PaRD brings together a larger and more diverse group of members than ever before, he called for the guiding principles of the strategy to be lived authentically and to "Becoming more Together". He thanked all those involved in organising the event and working on the strategy. Singh reflected on defining personal experiences and inspiration he drew from outstanding South African personalities such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu (find his [speech here](#)).

After warmly welcoming the participants, **Bishop Sithembele Sipuka**, the local co-host and President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), spoke about South Africa's pivotal role in the development of the African continent. He expressed his wish for the South African government to join PaRD as an official member. Sipuka pointed out that the pandemic has disproportionately affected the poorest and most marginalised communities. He highlighted the common denominator of all stakeholders present: concern for people's well-being and working together towards this goal.



The first roundtable discussion centred around the role of development cooperation in ending both **Extreme Poverty** and **Ensuring Food Security**.

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#SouthAfrica Deputy Minister of International Relations & Cooperation  
Candith Mashego-Dlamini spoke about realistic ways to end #poverty &  
ensure #foodsecurity and what #DevelopmentCooperation can do] 1 of  
many high-level speakers at #PaRDGAM2021 #DIRCO  
@DIRCO\_ZA



This session was opened virtually with key input from the South African Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, **Ms Candith Mashego-Dlamini**. She stressed that even though governments have a special responsibility in coordinating efforts, all sectors of society share responsibility for achieving the SDGs. Calling for an integrated and inclusive approach to the SDGs, she shared her hope that the event will mark the beginning of closer cooperation with PaRD. In this regard, **Mashego-Dlamini announced that she**

**would endorse Bishop Sipuka's request for South Africa to join PaRD as an official member before President Ramaphosa.**

**Ms Mastoera Sadan**, Chief Sector Expert, Social, National Planning Commission Secretariat (NDP) of the Government of South Africa, presented her work concerning the National Development Plan (NDP) for South Africa and its current status quo. Presenting an attempt to localise and nationalise efforts to achieve the SDGs, Ms Sadan noted that the impact of COVID-19 on national development has been severe as poverty has worsened, hunger has increased, life expectancy has decreased, and unemployment has considerably grown. This indicates the need for greater cooperation between the government and religious actors, including preparing upcoming national development plans.



The welcome addresses were followed by a panel discussion moderated by **Prof Jerry Pillay** of the University of Pretoria. Virtual and in-person panellists included **Peter Prove**, WCC; **Nontando Hadebe**, Side by Side; **Fred Nyabera**, Arigatou International and **Denise Kodhe**, AU-ECOSOCC. The session highlighted the extent to which COVID-19 has intensified food insecurity and negatively impacted the gains many countries had made on poverty reduction.

In a roundtable format, the second session focused on the **Localising Aid Agenda**, especially on the funding challenges for local actors during their COVID-19 response. Even though the localisation of aid has been on the international agenda for years, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced international actors to hand over more decision-making power and resources to local stakeholders. Still, many local (religious) actors face challenges accessing funding resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The roundtable saw engaging discussions with representatives of donor agencies like **Adam Nicholas Phillips**, USAID and various civil society and religious actors, including **Smruti Patel**, Charter4Change; **Mejindarpal Kaur**, UNITED SIKHS; **Shaykh Achmat Sedick**, NRASD and **Waseem Ahmad**, CEO of Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW). The discussions focused on the various challenges and possibilities, and potentials of a comprehensive localisation approach within the COVID-19 response and beyond. **Phillips**, the director of USAID's Neighbourhood Partnerships and the Local, Faith and Transformative (LFT) Partnerships Hub,

shared experiences of the LFT-Hub; its uniqueness is in fast-tracking procurement reform to strengthen USAID's ability to partner with diverse and non-traditional partners such as religious actors. He focused on local actors and how they can be identified, and the various obstacles governments face while working with local (religious) actors. Various panellists emphasised that policies have not caught up with current realities and need to change to better reach those in need and respect their agency. New models of cooperation should go beyond top-down program planning.



During the second half of day one, PaRD members received a summary on the progress of the partnership. It continues its work on **knowledge exchange, informing policy and capacity building**. Members active in the work-streams used the General Assembly of Members as an opportunity to discuss and revise the draft work-plans of the **four work-streams**, to establish next steps and to identify key advocacy events for each work-stream. All work-streams relate to SDG 17, which is the core of PaRD's identity: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development. PaRD currently has four work streams on **health** (SDG 3), **water, environment, and climate action** (WECARE-SDGs 6,13,14,15), **gender equality and empowerment** (SDG 5), and **sustaining peace** (SDG 16). PaRD will continue to maintain flexibility to respond to current crises and themes, including cross-cutting issues. Accordingly, PaRD has initiated an exchange on food advocacy and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

## Day 2 | November 9

The first session of day two addressed **Vaccine Equity**, the understanding that no nation should have a priority over another in terms of vaccine distribution or, as panellists reiterated: "Nobody is safe until everybody is safe." The session had contributions from various experts, including **Sarah Hess** from World Health Organisation (WHO) and **Helena Ballester** from the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office. The current global divide is well illustrated as one dose of vaccine is delivered to sub-Saharan Africa for every 15 doses delivered to G20 countries. A critical insight that ran throughout the presentation was that the approach of managing a global crisis at the national level through individualised solutions does not do justice to the transnational nature of the pandemic. Hess and Ballester made clear that religious actors are critical strategic partners in pandemic responses. They shared recommendations for fields of action such as reducing vaccine hesitancy and increasing trust in the vaccines, offering logistical support, and the function of religious leaders as role models.

Among the panellist were **Dr Katherine Marshall**, WFDD. She called for more attention to the "interconnectedness" of pandemic development and not to view the health crisis as an isolated problem. Looking at the research data collected so far on the COVID response, religious actors are not recognised as the central part of the response that they have played, earning them a "seat on key tables". Moreover, **Dr Marianna Leite**, ACT Alliance, shared insights from the recent ACT Africa workshop and the published declaration on advocating for vaccine equity - a shared responsibility. Additionally, **Dr Mohamed Elsanousi**, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, also shared examples from the *Faith4Vaccines* initiatives and

what concrete actions religious actors in the US have taken. Such interventions by *Faith4Vaccines* could be scaled up also in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The second session discussed how the **impact of religious actors on the SDGs can be measured**. This session was led by **Dr Esben Lunde Larsen**, former Danish Minister for Higher Education and Research and Minister for Environment and Food and currently, Director of the World Resource Institute (WRI) Faith and Sustainability. This session focused on how the accomplishments of religious actors and organisations can be measured, primarily in the realisation of SDGs around climate change prevention. There was a consensus that metrics need to be developed in an inclusive approach and that PaRD could play an important role.

The second half of the day focused on the **strategic plan for 2022-2026**. The strategy with the title **“Becoming more Together”** was developed on a consultative approach supported by Kaleido Consultancy, with input from the PaRD membership and leadership under the coordination of PaRD’s Secretariat. The strategy includes PaRD’s mission and vision, strategic and organisational priorities, and the principles under which PaRD will operate.

During the meeting, the Steering Group election results were announced.

**PaRD’s new co-chairs are: Hazel M.D. Dixon AU; Adam Philips, USAID and Peter Prove (WCC).**

**The new steering group members are** Fred Nyabera, Arigatou International; Hazel M.D. Dixon AUC-CIDO; Denise Kodhe AU-ECOSOCC; Hanno Spitzer BMZ; Mercy Munene, Cynesa; Atallah Fitzgibbon, IRW; Mohammed Abu-Nimer, KAICIID; Kristian Westad Bertelsen, MFA Denmark; Mejindarpal Kaur, UNITED SIKHS; Adam Nicholas Phillips, USAID; Peter Prove, WCC; Stefan Sengstmann, WVI.



**The outgoing PaRD leadership was sincerely thanked for their long-standing engagement.**

Int.Partnership Religion & Sustainable Development @P... - Nov 11  
PaRD welcomes new co-chair Hazel M.D Dixon from @AfricanUnion | Together, governments, multilateral entities and religions can use existing networks to achieve the #2030agenda | #TogetherForOurPlanet | #LocallyLedAdaptation



Grammy winner **Ani Zonneveld** dedicated her song “In my soul” to the former leadership. The **outgoing Steering Group** was composed of co-chairs **Prof Mohammed Abu-Nimer**, KAICIID and **Jørgen Thomsen**, Dan Church Aid/ACT Alliance, and members **Maria Lucia Uribe Torres**, Arigatou International; **Hellen Mugo**, CYNESA; **Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati**, Global Interfaith WASH Alliance; and **Mercy Niwe/Kimberly Parent**, World Bank.

### Day 3 | November 10

The day kicked off with a fishbowl discussion on fostering **social and religious cohesion** during the COVID-19 pandemic. This session was moderated virtually by **Prof Mohammed Abu-Nimer**, KAICIID. **Abdulkareem Majemu Shefiu**, Strength in Diversity Development Centre and **Rubina Bhatti**, National Commission on the Rights of Child Pakistan, opened the discussion with concrete examples of current challenges for social cohesion due to the COVID-19 pandemic, using local examples of their organisations’ work in Nigeria and Pakistan. Both

shared good examples and evidence of how religious actors are instrumental in promoting social cohesion for communities such as religious minorities, women, youth, people with disabilities even during a pandemic.

**Caroline Thomas**, Adyan Foundation; **Hazel Maureen Danetta Dixon**, AUC-CIDO and

Int.Partnership Religion & Sustainable Development @P... · Nov 10 ...  
Grammy winner @AniZonneveld founder and president of Muslims for Progressive Values @mpvusa uses all of her talents at #PaRDGAM2021 | Ani dedicated the song "In my Soul" to the outgoing PaRD Steering Group



**Yumiko Yokozecki**, UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building, shared their experiences working on inclusive approaches to religious and social cohesion from a country and regional perspective. The panel linked the topic to previous discussions, such as the need for vaccine equity, localisation of development cooperation, poverty reduction and food security, highlighting the need for an interdisciplinary, comprehensive approach to foster religious and social cohesion. Local (religious) actors implement many initiatives to foster social cohesion. To engage the transformative power of those local actors to

foster social inclusion for all, it was proposed for PaRD to work with existing networks and enhance learning and exchange across different areas of engagement and regions.

Afterwards, hybrid working sessions took place, and members participated in the respective sessions, for example, the parallel work-stream sessions and meetings of the steering group sub-committees (Budget & Finance, Membership Growth, Communication).

**The members unanimously approved and acclaimed the new five-year PaRD strategic plan.** This marked the conclusion of a process that shows PaRD's potential for cooperation at eye-level among all key entities.

The third day's final roundtable session covered the topic of **climate action** in the format of a multi-disciplinary discussion on the contributions of religious actors addressing climate change. **Prof Dr Francois Engelbrecht**, Director and Professor of Climatology at the Global Change Institute, gave input on Africa's vulnerability to climate change and shared perspectives from the IPCC Assessment Report related to the African continent. **Joan Okitoi-Heisig**, Project Manager at the World Evangelical Alliance and co-lead of the WECARE work-stream, moderated the session and introduced the first panellists, **Yukiko Yamada Morovic**, Technical Director for External Engagement and Programming, informed participants about World Vision's approach to environmental stewardship and climate action to advance climate justice. **Daniel Perell**, Representative to the Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office, shared his perspective on environmental justice, peace, and inclusive society and how humanity is in a constant independent interplay with nature and the natural world. **Mercy Wambui Munene**, Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA), explored the role of the youth in the fight for climate action and their call for action for older and current generations. **Ilana Stein**, Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, added to the debate by elaborating conservation efforts on the African continent while partnering with local communities in Africa. During an animated discussion and Q&A session, participants and panellists discussed the different measures and activities to



advance climate action and climate justice by enhancing cross-cutting collaboration, for example, through multi-stakeholder partnerships like PaRD.

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Thank You! | 10 November 2021 | Prof Mohammed Abu-Nimer leaves the podium but stays on #PaRD Steering Group. @mabunimer\_nimer @KAICIID



The closing remarks were held by **Prof Dr Muhammad Ilyas**, Chairman, International Dialogue, Research and Awareness Center, Pakistan; **Günter Nooke**, the German Chancellor's Personal Representative for Africa, German Government; **Ejaz Alam Augustine**, Minister for Human Rights, Minority Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Government of Panjab, Pakistan and the outgoing co-chairs **Jørgen Thomsen**, Dan Church Aid/ACT Alliance and **Prof Mohammed Abu-Nimer**, KAICIID. The speakers stressed the uniqueness of PaRD's approach and the success of the GAM despite the challenges due to the pandemic. They highlighted that in five years, PaRD has established itself as an important global hub for policy engagement, sharing knowledge, experiences and finding new ways of coordination and collaboration amongst governments, multilaterals, and religious actors.

Int.Partnership Religion & Sustainable Development @P... · Nov 11 ...  
Thank You! | 10 November 2021 | Jørgen Thomsen from @ACTAlliance leaves #PaRD Steering Group, he was co-chair since 2018 @ACTAllianceEU #PaRDGAM2021



## Day 4 | November 11

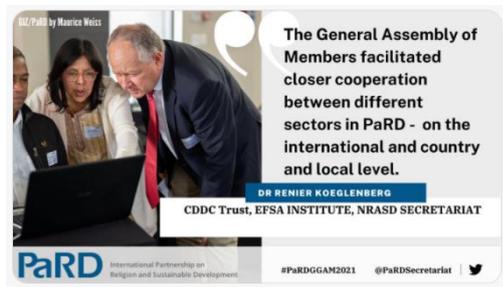
On the last day of the 2021 GAM hosted various side events convened by work-stream and member organisations. It began with a focus on the **contributions of young people**. Speaking online from Canada, **Abayjeet Singh**, co-founder of the Break the Divide Foundation, talked about how his student foundation created a global platform for exchange between young people, built on the idea of learning from others through listening and empathy. The foundation addresses issues such as climate change and mental health and aims to overcome divisions in society. Singh drew admiration and sparked an engaged Q&A session after highlighting how his religious background as a Sikh inspires his voluntary work.

One of PaRD's consistent aims has been to ensure that the voices of local religious and faith-based actors are heard. The PaRD Health work-stream organised two regional round table discussions for southern **Africa and Asia to amplify these voices**. The **round tables** brought together local religious and faith communities with key multilateral and government stakeholders to share best practices, challenges and experiences faced in the response. The roundtables focused on religious agency in the response and resources to COVID-19.

**Dr Elisabet Le Roux**, Stellenbosch University, presented a new Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLIFLC) study on Religion and Gender in donor policies and practice ([see full study here](#)) that examines how donors view and work with religious actors in interventions for gender equality (SDG5). How well this concern is mainstreamed in policies and practice was a key question. The session concluded with a solution-oriented discussion moderated by **Kirsten Laursen Muth**, JLIFLC and **Jørgen Thomsen** DanChurchAid/ACT Alliance. Whilst progress is visible, the session recommended that PaRD uses the report for further policy discussion and to ensure that all stakeholders live up to the principles they wish

to promote. It was also suggested that the PaRD Gender Equality and Empowerment work-stream organises a tri-party gender policy consultation in 2022.

To conclude the GAM 2021, the International Network on Religious Communities and



Sustainable Development with the Stellenbosch and Humboldt Universities jointly **launched the new Journal Religion & Development** by the Brill publisher. **Dr Philipp Öhlmann**, executive editor of the journal, explained the need for a journal – so far lacking – that is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of Religion and Development. Among the remarks was **Claudia Jordan** from the PaRD

Secretariat, noting that “with open, honest and profound research, which is presented in this journal, we can move towards a more just society and protect our planet.” Greetings came from around the world, and the opening panel of academics, religious actors and practitioners warmly welcomed the new journal as a visible platform for knowledge sharing (read more [here](#)).

*The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) was founded in 2016 by 12 members. PaRD has since grown to become a partnership of over 140 members with representatives from civil society, especially religious and faith-based actors, governments, multilateral entities, and academia. The Annual Meeting and General Assembly (GAM) of PaRD is coordinated by PaRD’s Secretariat, which supports members in implementing PaRD’s mission. The Secretariat’s office is located at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), the government owned German Agency for International Cooperation.*