

# AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA, KENYA

Long-term plan on the environment – summary

### INTRODUCTION

The origins of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) date back to 1891 when the Free Church of Scotland sent missionaries to East Africa. It was fully incorporated by 1956 and recognised as an ongoing denomination populated mostly by Africans. It has 450 pastors and more than 2,000 congregations in the three East Africa countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

The congregations are organised into 49 presbyteries and its head office is in Nairobi, Kenya. It serves about three million people every week through Sunday worship services.

The PCA runs the Presbyterian University of East Africa, 30 tertiary institutions, 168 secondary schools, 426 primary schools, three main hospitals with health clinics and dispensaries, one orphan care/rescue home, five national community centres, three national special schools for the deaf, three national children homes for the physically handicapped, two Woman's Guild national projects, a coastal hotel and a training college as well as a credit scheme.

It also has an active Church Men's Fellowship and organisations for women and young people as well as publishing church books and materials.

Environmental action is a new area of engagement for the PCEA. In 2010, the PCEA's 19th General Assembly instructed presbyteries to direct parishes and congregations to carry out activities that would mitigate adverse change effects on the environment such as water harvesting, planting drought resistant crops, forest conservation, on-farm tree planting and environmental awareness.

The seven-year long-term plan, drawn up by the Church's Mission Board under the theme of "Empowering the Church for Mission to all of Creation", was adopted by the PCEA General Assembly in April 2012. This is the highest authority of the Church and it instructed the church's presbyteries to disseminate and implement the plan as an opportunity to care for God's creation and enhance food security. The plan will now be the guiding document that will be used for implementation by the local presbyteries, parishes and congregations.

The PCEA has been working with ARC and its partner the Kenyan Organization for Environmental Education (KOE), to develop a toolkit on environmental education for sustainable development for use in church-sponsored schools. It has also participated in an ARC-organised three-day workshop of training in 'Farming God's Way' on sustainable agriculture practices in Kenya in May 2012.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION POINTS

1. Education and awareness: Integrate theology and environment into the training and practice in the Church. The Church, for example, should develop liturgies for Holy Communion that are sensitive to environmental concerns and promote

Harvest and First Fruits celebrations and Thanksgiving services as well as mainstream environmental education and research into its theology. Make it mandatory for all new clergy joining the ministry to complete a seminary level course on Biblical approaches to creation stewardship.

2. Promote tree planting through presbyteries, parishes, congregations, elder districts, schools, church groups and individuals. Every presbytery and presbyterian group should institute an annual tree planting day. The church should sensitise members on protection and taking care of trees planted. The PCEA Church should emulate examples in parishes where trees are planted during burial, wedding ceremonies and other church activities.

3. The Church should also maximise regional local language radio stations to disseminate relevant information to communities through radio awareness programmes and debates.

4. The Church should take advantage of the provision in the new constitution where the people of Kenya are all working towards 10% forest cover and the provision in the Agriculture Act specifying that 10% of the land should be planted with trees. The Church should therefore promote community participation in forest protection and conservation – encouraging Church members to join community forest associations in their areas.

5. The Church should encourage environmentally friendly income-generating projects such as bee keeping, use of wild fruits, woodlots development, medicinal trees as food, for example, muringa.

6. The Church should encourage proper water apportionment to avoid conflicts and should discourage direct discharge of biochemical and sewer waste into the water bodies.

7. The Church should encourage organic farming and use of biogas, promoting 'Farming God's Way' and conservation agriculture and start farming clubs in schools. The Church should also reclaim and adapt relevant cultural wisdom on sustainable agricultural practices.

8. All presbyteries to partner with other departments to set demonstration sites for environmentally friendly conservation methods. The Church should encourage soil conservation practices and protection of riparian areas for all communities. Encroachment of riparian areas should be considered a sin like any other sin.

9. The Church should network with other organisations on strategies to mitigate and mainstream issues of climate change and environmental and farming concerns. The Church should also explore ways of partnering in the implementation of Kenya's National Climate Change Response Strategy.

10. The Church should establish an environmental desk in its head office, as resolved in the 19th General Assembly. The Church should explore creating environmental regional desks in future. Meanwhile each presbytery should establish an environmental committee that will oversee environmental issues in the presbytery.

*This plan was endorsed by the highest authority of the Church, the PCEA's General Assembly, in April 2012.*

This plan was launched at ARC's Many Heavens, One Earth, Our Continent celebration held in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2012