

AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET

KENYA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN KENYA Long-term plan on the environment – summary

INTRODUCTION

The Kenya Episcopal Conference is the Assembly of the Catholic Bishops in Kenya. The Conference covers the 26 Catholic jurisdictions in Kenya spread over four metropolitan provinces with their 20 Dioceses, four Archdioceses, one Apostolic vicariate and one Military Ordinariat.

There are almost nine million Catholics in Kenya, with more than 2,000 priests and almost 800 parishes. There are nearly 9,000 Catholic educational institutes, almost 2,000 church-run hospitals and clinics and charitable institutions. In all 26 Catholic dioceses in Kenya there are three major Ecclesial Associations – the Catholic Women Association, the Catholic Men Association and Youth. These are strong grassroots groups which ensure community participation.

Environmental action is a relatively new priority for the Kenya Episcopal Conference. Some tree planting already takes place around national and diocesan shrines and the Conference runs a programme called 'Food for Work' where people are given food after digging terraces in their fields or planting trees.

A national consultative meeting on drawing up a long-term plan on the environment was held in Malindi Diocese in December 2011 for the Catholic Men Association and the Catholic Women Association. Workshops and seminars on environmental care and protection have been held in five dioceses. In March 2012 a national consultative meeting for implementation of the plan was attended by leaders of the Commission including the Bishop Chairman, KEC Commission for Pastoral and Lay Apostolate, members of the National Co-ordination office, national leaders of Ecclesial Movements and Associations and rectors of National and Diocesan Catholic shrines.

The proposed long-term plan will be run by the KEC-Catholic Secretariat, based in Nairobi, and will be implemented within the Church structure, from the Catholic family to the parish to the national level. Environmental care and sustainability are now given prominence in all pastoral projects implemented by the Catholic Church in Kenya. Representatives of the KEC are also involved with ARC in drawing up a toolkit on environmental education for use in Catholic schools in Kenya.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. To enhance co-ordination of Catholic Church in Kenya initiatives in environmental care and protection right from the Catholic family to the small Christian community parish level up to the national level;
2. To sensitise and educate Kenyans on their urgent role of stewardship in environmental care and protection through proper management of environmental resources on a sustainable basis;
3. To regenerate about 20% of forest cover in degraded national/diocesan shrines,

church compounds and church institutions land in the country, emphasising water conserving trees around water sources. This will benefit nature and the Kenyan population as a whole as they enjoy and experience God's presence in a wellmanaged environment;

4. To develop sustainable land and water management projects challenging adults, youth and children to cherish environmental care and protection;
5. To develop environmentally friendly sources of energy;
6. To build partnership with other like-minded organisations in Kenya and provide opportunities for exchange programmes.

PROPOSED PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Awareness and education on environmental stewardship based on Catholic social teaching, targeting clergy and religious, seminarians, catechists, Catholic women, men and youth associations;
- Launch of Bishops' pastoral letter on environmental care and protection to every diocese; Development of educational modules and workshops; Sunday sermons by pastors; Use of print and electronic media in promoting environmental care and protection through posters, church magazines and church radio programmes;
- Engagement of stakeholders and church-owned institutions/land: targeting shrines, diocese, parishes, Catholic schools, pastoral centres, retreat centres and church owned pieces of land;
- Supporting the institutions to love and protect their living and working environment in a way that is consistent with their faith; Competitions on environment-related activities; incorporate education on environmental care and protection in Catholic primary sponsored schools and train primary school teachers in environmental care and protection.

TREE PLANTING, FARMING & AGRICULTURE

- Plant around one million trees in the 26 Catholic dioceses of Kenya, from November 12 to December 14;
- Develop 29 tree nurseries – one in each of the dioceses and one in each of the three sample shrines. Diocesan tree nurseries will be managed throughout the project period using part of the proceeds from selling seedlings by men's, women's and youth groups managing diocesan tree nurseries;
- Develop seedbeds for indigenous vegetables; identify and give training to men, women and youth groups on tree nursery development; visit a governmental and a non-governmental tree planting and agroforestry project;
- Purchase 29 water tanks for rain water harvesting for diocesan tree nurseries;
- Purchase seedlings and plant an average of 300,000 trees in three shrines.

LAUNCH OF SUSTAINABLE STRATEGY AWARD

- Launch a Catholic Environmental Day with each Catholic to plant at least one tree before the onset of the annual rains.

In June 2012, the Kenya Episcopal Conference published a Pastoral letter to all Catholics in Kenya supporting the long-term plan. It said "faith commitment to a living planet is a Catholic commitment to the care of God's creation" and spoke of "the need to integrate the practice with our faith through Christian songs, poems, drama and homilies to promote care of the environment as a Christian obligation and priorities". It invites all Catholics to "prioritise their engagement with environmental care as a way of appreciating and advancing the creative mission of God whose image we bear. Through our Catholic institutions, schools, parishes, retreat centres, pastoral centres, shrines and church-owned land, we are committed to realise this dream of building a healthy society, healthy earth and healthy Church".

The Pastoral letter was signed by the Chairman of KEC-Commission for Pastoral and Lay Apostolate, Bishop James Maria Wainaina

This long-term plan has been endorsed by Rt. Rev. Philip Anyolo, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Homa Bay, & Chairman – Commission for Pastoral & Lay Apostolate and by Rev. Fr. Charles Odira, National Executive Secretary, Commission for Pastoral & Lay Apostolate, Kenya Episcopal Conference.

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