

AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET

BHUMI AFRICA: TREADING LIGHTLY ON MOTHER EARTH Long-term plan on the environment – summary

INTRODUCTION

The Bhumi Project is a worldwide Hindu response to the environmental issues facing our planet. The initiative is facilitated by the Oxford Centre of Hindu Studies in partnership with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. Its purpose is to educate, inspire, inform, and connect Hindus interested in service to Mother Earth. It launched its Nine-Year Plan for environmental action at ARC's Windsor Celebration in 2009.

Bhumi Africa, as part of the larger Bhumi Project, is facilitated by the Hindu Council of Africa. It is a series of short and long-term initiatives aimed at educating Hindus about the environment based on Hindu teachings. It also aims to provide practical steps that Hindus can take in their daily lives and worship to have a positive impact on the environment in Africa.

There are 1.7 million Hindus in Africa. According to records from the Hindu Council of Kenya, in Nairobi alone, there are 35,000 Hindus, making up 1% of Nairobi's population. Between them they have established 27 temples; 40 social, cultural and sports facilities; 22 schools; nine medical facilities; more than 20 restaurants and hotels; and 10 written and radio media outlets.

Hindus in Africa are highly influential and deeply connected to community and continental development. At present, the environmental work of the Hindu community in Africa has been focused on tree planting initiatives. Bhumi Africa aims to promote and expand such work. We wish to encourage and inspire Hindus to tread lightly on Mother Earth and work with communities of other faith groups to create a clean, green society for all.

NINE-YEAR BHUMI AFRICA PLAN

To achieve this, a Nine-Year Bhumi Africa Plan has been drawn up by a team of young Hindus already working in the environmental field in Nairobi, in conjunction with the Hindu Council of Kenya. The Bhumi Africa Nine-Year Plan incorporates African needs, interests and concerns about Mother Earth to be addressed through networking, action and education.

NETWORKING

Hindu religious, cultural and social institutions will be invited to develop their own Nine-Year Plan. Using the Bhumi Africa Nine-Year Plan as a basis, they will be asked to see which areas of their work and activities could be more environmentally friendly. This will be done in phases, focusing initially in Kenya (years one & two), East Africa (years three & four) and lastly, the rest of Africa (year five onwards).

The Hindu community is well connected and informed. The Bhumi Africa initiative will reach out to Hindu communities to inform them about the initiative and environmental protection and conservation through existing media outlets. Partnerships will be formed

with non-Hindus, local schools, government agencies and environmental organisations to exchange and implement ideas and projects.

ACTION

Over the years Hindus in Africa have become well established and have invested heavily in religious and cultural centres and a range of social amenities (hospitals, schools, social centres) and businesses (industries, commercial buildings, banks, shops, hotels, restaurants, agricultural farms). Through the Bhumi project we aim to make these more environmentally friendly.

First, green audits will identify the status of the buildings and land. This will be followed by environmental certification which will guide the Hindu community to create ecofriendly buildings, manage the environment and achieve sustainable development. This is aimed at places of worship and other assets in the Hindu community, including those which are being built or to be built in the future.

Modern lifestyles demand a lot from the environment, leading to environmental degradation and destruction. In order to tackle the challenges of environmental degradation and achieve a greener and cleaner environment, we will ask Hindus to take seriously their individual and collective environmental responsibilities in order to make green lifestyle choices within their daily domestic activities and households.

At both the community and household levels, Bhumi Africa will encourage energy efficiency through use of solar power and eco-friendly lighting options; water conservation through rain-water harvesting systems and water recycling strategies; appropriate waste management through reusing, reducing and recycling paper, plastic, bio-degradable and electronic waste; consumption of locally sourced and organic food; afforestation in water catchments and sustainable charcoal use; and car pooling.

Hindu festivals add to the colours of our heritage and help us to reinforce the presence of God in the life of an individual, the family and the community as a whole. However, celebrating some of these festivals significantly contributes to pollution and waste. As part of the Bhumi Initiative, Hindu communities will be encouraged to green these events by greatly reducing waste and pollutants. A Hindu festival will be identified to celebrate as Hindu Environment Day where Hindus (individuals, businesses, and temples), pledge their commitment to the environment.

The initiative will also lobby for the phasing out of plastic bags through the use of 'Bhumi bags' (durable cloth bags), which will be promoted for use in Hindu temples and Hinduowned community centres and shops. The use of eco-charcoal in temples, Hindu community centres, industries and residential homes will also be promoted.

EDUCATION

The environment holds a very dear place in the lives of Hindus. A lot of importance is given to the sun, plants, trees and animals through daily prayers and practices. These ideas are well illustrated in the scriptures and stories of the tradition. Through Bhumi Africa, we plan to create awareness about these ancient environmental teachings and how they are relevant in modern times.

Students and youth provide a formidable force in bringing about environmental change in any community. Being young, educated and savvy, students within Hindu community schools and youth from community youth groups will be asked to take action on a cause that will affect their future by playing a core role in Bhumi Africa.

A chapter on environmental relevance will be introduced into Hindu Religious Education in schools and seminars, and camps promoting green Hinduism will be organised. Initiatives on environmental protection will be promoted through widely circulated Asian weeklies, temple and community newsletters, mobile phones and popular radio stations.

The Bhumi Africa Nine-Year Plan has been endorsed by the Hindu Council of Africa and various Hindu community leaders. We wish to encourage and involve as many Hindu institutions and individuals as possible to join us, support our work, and to form working groups to implement their own versions of the Nine-Year Plan

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