

AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET

ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHIDO CHURCH

Long-term plan on the environment – summary

INTRODUCTION

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church has 43.5 million followers and more than 500,000 clergy. It has 70,000 parish churches, with 6.5 million registered Sunday School youth and some 3,000 monasteries. In each local parish there may be up to 30 priests and deacons. These clergy are highly integrated within the community – often as farmers themselves. Their moral integrity and influence among the community is immense, giving them a unique status within Ethiopian society.

The Church's development wing, the Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC), was established in 1972 and is a member of the Ethiopian Civil Society Network on Climate Change. It leads the forest and protected areas working group within that Network. It has extensive experience of work in forestry management, in sustainable agriculture projects, as well as projects for the rehabilitation and conservation of degraded lands to improve food security and rural livelihoods and in the management of natural resources. The decline of land productivity and soil fertility in Ethiopia has led to poverty, loss of biodiversity and food security.

DICAC has drawn up a 10-year plan with five main programmes to help address these issues – working through the Church's monastic communities. It is proposed that monastic communities act as pioneers for the introduction of environmental conservation and carbon trading and that they become centres of demonstration and learning for improved agricultural practices, sustainable land management techniques and innovations such as the introduction of biogas digesters and solar energy.

1. PROTECTION OF CHURCH FORESTS

In Ethiopia 45% of parish churches have forests and 75% of its monasteries are surrounded by forests. Monasteries and churches are traditional centres for the protection of indigenous biodiversity, as well as for the promotion of a faith-based respect for nature.

Major activities

- Create awareness within the community about the importance and role of church forests;
 - Provide an environmental award and financial support for the churches involved;
 - Identify and create an inventory of forest cover and biomass and map church forests.
- The project would include an assessment of church forests' potential role to rehabilitate degraded lands and conserve wildlife, to play a critical role in watershed management improving ground and spring water sources and to participate in bio fuel production as well as to become education centres for teaching sustainable land management and forestry development.

2. IMPROVED RURAL FOOD SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The aim is to create a learning centre in each monastery for improved technology demonstration and the dissemination of such technology to the local community. In

addition, there are plans to:

- Promote the regeneration of natural woodlands and plant new woodlots in communal areas harvesting products under sustainable management plans and thus reduce the pressure on church forests;
- Diversify farming using improved crops and varieties adapted to the local agroecology;
- Support the market production of perennial and annual crops to increase incomes with community managed improved micro-irrigation;
- Encourage beekeeping, poultry keeping and dairy farming through promoting organic farming, biofarming and agroforestry;
- Promote and support natural resources management using locally accepted and indigenous strategies;
- Promote degraded communal land reclamation and gully rehabilitation as well as farmland and homesteads environmental protection measures;
- Develop community managed irrigation schemes.

3. CARBON DEVELOPMENT

This focuses on exploring the potential for forests of monastic and parish churches to generate income for the local communities through carbon trading and carbon credits while contributing to efforts to mitigate against carbon emission and climate change. Church forests will be assessed for their potential to generate carbon benefits. Other activities include tree planting, natural woodland regeneration, agroforestry, conservation agriculture, soil and water conservation practices, improved management of existing woodlands, and prevention of deforestation and degradation. This work will be carried out with Terra Global Capital.

4. ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY ENERGY SAVING BIOGAS DIGESTERS IN MONASTERIES

Monastic and rural communities in Ethiopia use wood and cow dung for cooking and gasoil for lighting. The plan recommends the installation of biogas digesters as an alternative source of energy for monastic communities. This would reduce tree cutting, conserve energy, reduce the work burden for women and children from gathering firewood and reduce health problems for women and girls from the use of firewood and charcoal.

Organic farming systems will also be developed using the by-product of the biogas digester as organic fertilizer. Farmers would be trained at each site in biofarm technology. The vision is to establish biogas digesters in at least 1,000 monasteries. Three pilot sites with farmer training at nunneries have been funded by ARC.

5. TRAINING FOR THE CLERGY AND MONASTIC COMMUNITIES

It is proposed to introduce education on how to care for the environment, including environmental conservation, climate change, mitigation and adaption, from a practical and theological perspective into the curriculum and training manuals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's 22 clergy training centres. A total of 35 clergy in each clergy training centre will be trained each year in environmental conservation for the next 10 years. Solar energy will also be installed in 15 clergy centres.

This long term plan has the endorsement of Dr. Agedew Redie, Commissioner of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church – Development And Inter Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC). It has been drawn up in consultation with the Church's monasteries, priests and development staff in DICAC.

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