



THE
**BHUMI
AFRICA**
PROJECT



Treading Lightly on Mother Earth

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INTRODUCTION

Hindus hold a deep reverence for life, and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space—as well as all the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are bound to each other within life’s cosmic web through our great tradition. Calling the earth ‘Mother Earth’ Hindus venerate the life-giving, resource-providing and nurturing aspects of nature by embodying it in the form of the mother.

***Samudra vasane Devi, Parvata stana mandale
Vishnupatni namastubhyam, Paada sparsha kshamasvame***

*O! Mother Earth, who has the ocean as clothes and mountains and forests on her body,
who is the wife of Lord Vishnu, I bow to you.
Please forgive me for I have to step on you, trample/touch you with my feet,
for I have to go around my daily chores to make my destiny, my fate!*

Relevant also in this age and time, this small prayer from the ancient Hindu scriptures is recited in the morning to start the day. Through this prayer one acknowledges and appreciates the bountiful nature of Mother Earth and asks for forgiveness, recognising the damage we’re causing and the burden we are imposing on her through our daily activities. Over the last few centuries, we have all done much more harm to Mother Earth, than our daily trampling. As environmental degradation, global warming and climate change become critical issues in our lives, we need to begin treading lightly on Mother Earth, else the cosmic web will fall apart and we will have failed our duty as Hindus.

BHUMI AFRICA

So what is Bhumi Africa and how do we tread lightly on Mother Earth? The Bhumi Project, a worldwide Hindu response to environmental issues facing our planet, is facilitated by the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, in partnership with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation Centre and backed by the United Nations Development Programme. Its purpose is to educate, inspire, inform, and connect Hindus and non-Hindus concerned with issues of global warming. It is the only central hub of information about Hindu environmental projects around the world; and aims to provide publicity, financial support and scriptural backing to such projects in order to maximize their impacts. Bhumi Africa, a part of the larger Bhumi Project, is facilitated by Hindu Council of Africa. It is a series of short and long term initiatives aimed at educating people about Hindu views on the environment and to provide practical steps they can take in their daily lives (and also specifically within Hindu worship) to have a positive impact on the environment in Africa.

In March 2011 a conference of African Christian and Muslim leaders was held in Nairobi, Kenya, convened by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). The aim of the gathering was to discuss how religious communities in Africa can address environmental and climate concerns. Hearing of the large and influential Hindu community in East Africa, ARC extended an invitation to the Hindu Council of Africa and a representative of the Bhumi Project. The meeting proved very successful, with delegates learning of the many environmental projects the Hindu Council has

undertaken. Both ARC and the Bhumi Project were impressed and keen to work further with the community.

In the months that followed the Bhumi Project and the Hindu Council discussed how they could create a working relationship that would be beneficial to both parties. On the suggestion of ARC, and in line with other faith communities ARC had been working with in Africa, it was decided that the Hindu Council of Africa would lead the Bhumi Project for Africa.

AIM OF BHUMI AFRICA

Africa is a continent of great extremes and diversity; from tropical rainforests, to pristine white sandy beaches, to snow-capped mountains, and hot burning deserts. It is resource rich, and the Dark Continent is finally emerging and flowering with development. This has led to an increase in anthropogenic emissions, deforestation, unsustainable water usage, unsustainable land development and resource depletion and destruction. Despite being a small community, Hindus in Africa are highly influential and deeply connected to community and continental development. The Bhumi initiative in Africa, must therefore engage with the wider community on sustainable ecological footprints, while focusing on greening their religious practices and lifestyles.

Bhumi Africa aims to reduce the Hindu community's burden on Mother Earth by creating a clean, green society.

BHUMI AFRICA 9-YEAR PLAN

To draw up the 9-year Bhumi Africa plan, a small team was established in Nairobi comprising of young Hindus already working in the environmental field. Using the 9 Year Plan developed by the Bhumi Project in 2009 and the ARC seven key areas (Appendix 4), this African team presents the Bhumi Africa 9 Year Plan to incorporate African needs, interests and concerns.

In the African context, Hindus are identified as a community. This community of 1.7 million people comprises all individuals who practice the Hindu Dharma and includes the Sikhs and Jains. This plan, thus, encompasses these two groups as well. Hindus do not have a single authoritative figure who overlooks the religion and its activities. This plan is thus developed under the auspices of Hindu Council of Africa.

The Bhumi Africa 9 Year Plan is designed to be implemented in three phases (Appendix 1). In phase one, which covers the first 2 years major activities will be focused in Kenya, where the Bhumi Africa team is based. Thus, this current plan has a large focus on Kenya. During phase one, we will implement activities in Kenya while planning to expand into East Africa. In phase two (year 3 and 4), we will implement activities in East Africa, continuing with activities in Kenya while we plan to expand in the rest of Africa. In phase three (year 5-9), we will continue activities in Kenya and East Africa and expand to the rest of Africa.

The implementation will require funds to run the activities. Previous environmental activities within the Hindu community have seen funding from Hindu groups and individuals. We are certain these funds will be available for the proposed Bhumi Africa activities. However to ensure sustainability of the Bhumi Africa activities, we will work with strategic partners and set up fund-raising platforms through which we will collect money regularly.

1. FAITH-CONSISTENT USE OF ASSETS

Skimming over the African landscape, one marvels over the numerous Hindu religious and cultural centres with beautiful intricate architecture and lush well landscaped gardens. This is only possible due to the abundant space, a definite blessing of the African continent. Over the years the Hindus in Africa have become well established and have invested heavily in a range of social amenities (hospitals, schools, social centres) and businesses (industries, commercial buildings, banks, shops, hotels, restaurants, agricultural farms, etc.). Through the Bhumi project we aim to green up this wide range of community and individual assets.

Firstly green audits will be done to identify the status of the asset. This will be followed by environmental certification which will guide the Hindu community to make important improvements to create eco-friendly buildings, manage the environment and to achieve sustainable development. This is aimed for places of worship and other assets owned by individuals or the Hindu community, including those which are being built or to be built in the future. Consequently we aim to address:

a. Energy Efficiency

- Use solar power for lighting and water heating
- Maximize use of natural light and use environmentally friendly bulbs

b. Water Conservation

- Develop rain-water harvesting systems

- Implement appropriate water recycling strategies
- c. Waste Management**
 - Reuse, reduce and recycle paper, plastic, bio-degradable and electronic waste
- d. Buy Local, Eat Local, Go Organic**
 - Adopt buy local, eat local policy to reduce food miles
 - Promote organic farming and consumption of organic food
- e. Afforestation and Forest Preservation**
 - Plant indigenous trees in water catchments, degraded forests and create green community areas
 - Promote use of sustainable wood and charcoal to prevent forest destruction

Paper recycling and afforestation have previously been going on, however through the Bhumi initiative, we plan to have a collective effort to enhance both.

2. EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Students and youth provide a formidable force in bringing about environmental change in any community. Growing up in a diverse society, the youth hold the key to connecting the communities through new beginnings and strengthening old ties.

Being young, educated and savvy, students (within the various Hindu community schools) and youth (within the various community youth groups) will be empowered to take action on a cause that will affect their future, and be a core part in the development of Bhumi Africa. Programs will be implemented through the formal and informal channel:

- a. Education Syllabus**
 - There already exists a syllabus for Hindu Religious Education in schools. A chapter on environmental relevance to the religion and how to practice green Hinduism will be included
- b. Seminars and Camps**
 - For youth groups, organise seminars and camps to promote green Hinduism through activities and short courses

3. WISDOM

The environment holds a very dear place in the lives of Hindus. Through our daily prayers and practices, a lot of importance is given to the sun, plants, trees and animals. These ideas are well illustrated in the scriptures and mythologies. Through Bhumi Africa, we plan to create awareness about these ancient environmental considerations:

- a. Scriptures and Mythologies**
 - Re-discover and understand ancient environmental practices and implement relevant ones
- b. Religious and community leaders**
 - Identify and learn about pro-environment ancient and current religious and community leaders

- Train current religious and community leaders on environmental issues and sustainable solutions

4. LIFESTYLES

In this modern day and age, people's way of living demands a lot from the environment. Consequently this leads to environmental degradation and destruction. In order to tackle the challenges of environmental degradation and achieve a greener and cleaner environmental goal, Hindus should rethink environmental responsibility and make green lifestyle choices within their daily domestic activities:

a. Energy Efficiency

- Use solar power for lighting and water heating at home
- Maximize use of natural light and use environmentally friendly bulbs

b. Water Conservation

- Develop rain-water harvesting systems
- Implement appropriate water recycling strategies

c. Waste Management

- Reuse, reduce and recycle paper, plastic, bio-degradable and electronic waste

d. Buy Local, Eat Local, Go Organic

- Adopt buy local, eat local policy to reduce food miles
- Promote organic kitchen gardens and consumption of organic food

e. Afforestation and Forest Preservation

- Plant indigenous trees for individual (e.g. birthday) and family (e.g. wedding) events creating green residential areas
- Promote use of sustainable wood and charcoal to prevent forest destruction

f. Reduce carbon footprint

- Use the intricate community network to promote car pooling schemes
- Carbon neutralise personal footprint e.g. weddings, driving and flying carbon miles

5. MEDIA AND ADVOCACY

The Hindu community is well connected and informed through various sources of news. The Bhumi Africa initiative will reach out to the Hindus with messages of the initiative and environment protection using these various written and radio media outlets:

a. Paper Media

- Widely circulated publication - Asian weekly, Awaaz
- Temple and community newsletters

b. Electronic and Mobile phone Media

- Emails and websites
- Sms through mobile phones

c. Radio Media

- 2 major radio stations are operated which many Hindus tune to – Sound Asia and East fm

d. Lobbying

- Phase out use of plastic through the use of ‘Bhumi bags’ (durable cloth bags) which will be promoted for use in Hindu temples and community centres and supermarkets and shops owned by Hindus
- Promote use of eco-charcoal in temples, community centres, industries and residential homes

6. PARTNERSHIPS

Important partnerships will be formed to share and take forward the Bhumi Initiative:

a. Eco-Twinning

- School and youth groups will twin with other school and youth groups within the country to exchange and implement environmental ideas and projects
- Temples and community centres will twin with other religious and social groups within the country to exchange and implement environmental ideas and projects

b. Partnerships

- Hindus will partner with locally-based environmental and conservation institutions and organisations to provide voluntary services in assisting to implement environmental and nature conservation projects within the country

7. CELEBRATION

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. As part of the Bhumi Initiative, the Hindu Community will be encouraged to green these events:

- **Green festivals**
 - Discover the precious reasons behind the rites and rituals of our festivals and identify and implement green ways of celebrating them
 - Carbon neutralise the festivals, celebrations and events like melas
 - Identify a Hindu festival to celebrate as Hindu environment day as well as in honour of Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai
- **Environment Pledge Day**
 - Introduce a day when Hindus (individuals, businesses, temples) pledge their commitment to the environment over a period of time

CONCLUSION

The Hindu community in Africa is connected to other religions, indigenous communities, government offices and civil societies, to form an intricate silk web called the 'African community'. Bhumi Africa's endeavour is to reduce the Hindu community's burden on Mother Earth by developing projects that foster linkages. Initiatives like Bhumi Africa play an integral role in raising awareness, empowering communities, and taking our efforts to fight environmental degradation several significant steps further. With the increased drive towards global environmental change, now is the time to take action and move so much farther ahead in treading lightly and preserving the Bhumi.

If not us, who?

If not now, when?

APPENDIX 1: PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

PHASE	ACTION
ONE Year 1 and 2	Plan and implement activities in Kenya Plan for expansion to East Africa
TWO Year 3 and 4	Continue with activities in Kenya Expand to East Africa Plan for expansion to rest of Africa
THREE Year 5-9	Continue with activities in Kenya and East Africa Expand to rest of Africa

APPENDIX 2: HINDU PRESENCE IN AFRICA

While the plan is focused to eventually cover Africa, the initial impact of the Bhumi activities will be within the Nairobi region. Table 1 and 2 below list the Hindu religious, cultural and social amenities within the Nairobi region. It is estimated that about 35,000 Hindus live in Nairobi.

Table 1. Temples and Institutions in Nairobi

Temples	Community Institutes	Other Institutions
Akshar Purshotam Swaminarayan Sanstha	Arya Stree Samaj	Chinmaya Mission Seva Trust
Ambajee Temple	Arya Young Women's Association	Gayatri Pariwar
Arya Samaj	Aryan Club	Hindu Religious & Service Center
Ayyappa Seva Samaj	Bhagini Samaj	Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)
Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual Centre	Cutchi Leva Patel Samaj	Kala Niketan Shishukunj
Cutch Satsang Swaminarayan Temple	East Africa Rajput League	Sita Ram Parivar
Cutchi Gujarati Hindu Union	East Africa Ramgharia Board	Young Jains
East Africa Namdhari Sangat	Gurudwara Nanaksar	
East Africa Satsang Swaminarayan Temple	Limbachia Gnati Mandal	
Gurudwara Bazaar Nairobi	Lohana Ladies Circle	
Gurudwara Ramgharia Railway	Lohana Mahajan Mandal	
Hanuman Temple	Lohana Mahila Mandal	
ISKCON	Lohana Youth League	
Jalaram Satsang Mandal	Maharashtra Mandal	
Kenya Brahma Samaj	Nairobi Luhar Gnati Mandal	
Mangal Mandir	Nairobi Rajput Dhobi Association	
Pattni Brotherhood	Oshwal Mahila Mandal	
Pushtimagiya Vaishnav Sangh	Oshwal Youth League	
Ram Mandir	Patel Brotherhood	
Ramdarbar - Lohana Mahajan Mandal	Shree CLP Samaj Youth League	
Sai Dham	Shree Kachchha Madhapar P. G. Mandal	
Shree Gurjar Suthar Vishwakarma Mandir	Shree Kadwa Patidar Samaj	
Shree Sanatam Dharam Sabha	Shree Kathiawar Jansari Mandal	
Shree Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan	Shree Navnat Vanik Mahajan	
Sorathia Prajapati Gnati Mandal	Shree Sthanakvasi Jain Sangh	
Visa Oshwal Derasar	Shree Vanik Vaishnav Mahajan	
Wanza Union	Siri Guru Singh Sabha	
	Stree Satsang Mandal	
	Swami Siddhant Sajjivan Mandal	
	Visa Oshwal Community	

Table 2. Social Amenities, Sports Facilities and Media Channels in Nairobi owned and run by Hindus

Schools / Colleges	Hospitals	Restaurants / Cafes	Publications
Arya Samaj Boys High School	BAPS Clinic	Anghiti Restaturant	Amar Bharati
Arya Samaj Girls High School	E.A.S.S. Clinic	Ashiana	Asian Weekly
Arya Vedic	Guru Nanak	Chowpaty	Hindu Deep
Bhrama Samaj Nursery School	Jalaram Diagnostic Center	Handi	Nairobi Star
Brookhouse School	Lions sight first eye hospital	Handi Udupi	Oshwal Newsletter
C.G.H.U Nursery School	M.P. Shah	Haveli	Saastha
C.G.H.U Primary School	Nairobi West Hospital	Kadai King Restaurant	Sikh Sandesh
C.G.H.U. Secondary School	Parkroad Nursing Home	Maharaja	
E.A.S.S. Nursery School	S.C.L.P.S Clinic	Ole Sereni	
Khalsa Primary School		Open House	
Khalsa Secondary School		Punjabi Dhaba	
Nairobi Academy Kindergarten		Riyas Delicious Corner	
Oshwal Academy High		Ruchira Restaurant	
Oshwal Academy Nursery		Slush	
Oshwal Academy Primary		Taj	
Oshwal Academy Senior High			
Oshwal College			
Parklands Arya Girls High Sch			
S.S.D High School	Sports Clubs	Hotels	Radio Stations
S.S.D Primary School	Kanbis Sports Club	Ole Sereni	East FM
Samaj School	Nairobi Gymkhana	Sankara	Sound Asia
Vivekanand Baal Mandir	Simba Union		

Table 3. Estimated population of Hindus in Africa per country

Country	Population
South Africa	800,000
Mauritius	700,000
Kenya	70,000
Nigeria	25,000
Uganda	15,000
Botswana	12,000
Tanzania	12,000
Burundi	6,000
Zambia	6,000
Zimbabwe	6,000
Ghana	3,000
Mozambique	3,000
Malawi	2,000
Sudan	1,500
Benin	1,000
Madagascar	1,000
Rwanda	700
Ethiopia	500
Togo	500
Seychelles	400
Congo	300
	1,665,900

APPENDIX 3: HINDUS IN AFRICA – A BRIEF HISTORY

Hinduism took root in Africa in the late 19th century through the spread of the British Empire, which colonized huge swaths of land throughout Africa and Asia, including almost the entirety of the Indian subcontinent. Many Indians were recruited as indentured servants throughout the British Empire, settling mainly in the British colonies of Southern and Eastern Africa. The descendants of these settlers often chose to remain in Africa after the end of colonial rule, developing Indo-African communities that remain to this day.

India had a long history of interaction with East Africa, first recorded as trade during the time of the Roman Empire. An Indian presence in Africa has been discovered at archaeological sites in Zimbabwe and the Swahili coasts. Remains of small Indo-African colonies have also been identified on Madagascar and Zanzibar. Zanzibar appears to have been the centre of South Asian mercantile, which pre-dates the entry of the Europeans. Even today words from Indian languages can be found in the Swahili Language.

Hindus first appeared in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mauritius. Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are among the Indian states from which the first Hindus emigrated. An Indian merchant class soon formed around the developing communities. Revenues accumulated for the construction and maintenance of the first temples, built on plantations or at the outskirts of the town. Large temples were built as early as the 1880s. During the early decades, Hindus preserved a broad array of rituals and customs even though they shared temple space across various sects. The temples became eclectic places of worship and helped to solidify a cultural identity for Hindus living far away from their Indian homes.

Hinduism is non-proselytizing religion and was usually not propagated to the same lengths or through the same means as Christianity and Islam. As such, it has mostly been confined to practice by the Indo-African communities of these countries. However, in post-colonial Africa, a small-scale movement for Hinduism and its propagation outside the Indo-African community has occurred, spearheaded by such individuals as Swami Ghanananda, the first Hindu swami of Ghana. Today, Lagos, Nigeria, which did not receive an original influx of Indian migrants as did countries such as Kenya, South Africa and Mauritius, is home to over 25,000 Hindus, mostly local converts and more recent, post-independence Indian immigrants.

Hindus have been and still are an important part of Africa. They have shed their blood towards attaining the freedom and development of this continent. From the likes of Mahatma Gandhi to Mulji Madhvani, from Chief Justice C. B. Madan to Sir Chande, all have contributed in a huge way to the ethos of this continent. For most Hindus in Africa, they consider themselves as much Africans as the others and Africa as their continent.

APPENDIX 4: SEVEN KEY AREAS

THE SEVEN KEY AREAS FOR CREATING A LONG-TERM FAITH PLAN TO PROTECT THE LIVING PLANET

(from 'Many Heavens One Earth', Alliance of Religions and Conservation).

There are seven key areas in which many of the world's major faith traditions can have huge impact on environmental action through their own resources, traditions and beliefs.

1. Faith-consistent use of assets – land, investments, medical facilities, purchasing and property.
2. Education and young people in both formal and informal situations – including school buildings and curricula, as well as nature teaching and camps.
3. Wisdom – including theological education and training, as well as rediscovering past teachings and understandings about the natural world from religious texts, and helping people adapt to new situations in areas where climate change makes this necessary.
4. Lifestyles.
5. Media and advocacy.
6. Partnerships, eco-twinning, and creating and funding their own environment departments.
7. Celebration.

APPENDIX 5: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following individuals and organisations have contributed towards the creation of the Bhumi Africa Plan:

Sponsors:

- Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)

Preparation of Plan:

- Anita Hirani
- Deepali Gohil
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- Mat McDermott - Business and Energy Editor - treehugger.com / Bhumi Advisor
- Gopal Lila Das - Project Manager, The Bhumi Project

Om, Dhyaoah Shaantih, Antariksha Shaantih,
Prithavi Shaantih, Aapah Shaantih, Oshadhyah Shaantih,
Vanaspatyah Shaantih, Vishvedevah Shaantih, Brahma
Shaantih, Sarvam Shaantih, Shaantih Eva Shaantih,
Saa Maa Shaantir-edhi,
Om Shaantih, Shaantih, Shaantih

*Om. May there be peace in the sky and in space. May there be
peace on land and in the waters. May herbs and food bring us
peace. May all the personifications of God bring us peace. May
God bring us peace. May there be peace throughout the world.
May the peace be peaceful. May God give me such peace.*



**For further information on
The Bhumi Africa Project**

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