

PROGRAMME TITLE: ROLE OF CHURCH PARISHES IN PROTECTING, REHABILITATING THE ENVIRONMENT AND FIGHTING AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE IN RWANDA

I. INTRODUCTION

a) General context of the programme

At the worldly summit of June 1992 in Rio, delegates realised the failure of the classic conception of development and called the International community to put in place strong measures towards sustainable development, which responds to the needs of the present without hindering the capacity of future generations to respond to their needs as well. It is such a kind of development that we need now, a development that considers the present without dissociating itself from the future and which puts mankind in the centre of all initiatives.

The problem CPR would like to contribute to in this project is the fight against the deterioration of human life due to climate change. The last thirty years have been marked both by the deterioration of human conditions and the destruction of the environment. The situation of a degraded environment is due, among other things, to the rapid increase of the population. On top of that, there is a need for the environment to respond to various human needs and yet the world is facing challenges that prevent this, such as climate change, ecosystem instability, famine, the destruction of natural resources, environment disparities, extreme vulnerability within marginalized people who are exposed to risks related to climate change and natural catastrophes.

This inadequate situation is compromising the efforts towards sustainable development when one takes into account the social, economic and developmental aspect of it.

The problem of environment is actually more precarious than ever before. There is now a lot of concentration of Carbon Dioxide (Co₂), one of the major gases contributing to global warming. The increase of planetary warming is essentially due to the emission of biomass and energies. The climate change puts an important pressure on the ecosystems already affected by the increased demand on resources.

Many regions of the world have now experienced significant climate warming leading to droughts, floods and other extremely disastrous events.

These signs of climate change are mostly due to an average increase of temperature estimated at 0,7c since 1990 (Stern report 2006) and scientists are predicting that in 2100, the global warming would shift from 1,4°C to 5,8°C.

b) Context of Rwanda

Called a country of one thousand hills, Rwanda is part of the Great Lakes Region and member of the East Africa Community. It has a chain of high volcanic mountains in the North (3500 to 4500 meters high), it is bordered by Akagera swamp in the East, Bugesera swamp in South East, Nyungwe natural forest in South West and the Lake Kivu in the West. The average temperature of Rwanda is between 18 to 25°. The total land area of Rwanda is 26.338 sq.km, with an important population currently estimated at 9.9 millions of which 60% live in poverty and 42% of them are in extreme poverty. The density of population is around 379 / sq.km.

Rwanda is experiencing negative signs of climate change which can be described as follows:

- Long periods of droughts especially in southern and Eastern parts of the country where drought used to be short;
- An important pressure of strong demographic density leading to the destruction of the ecosystem;
- Intensive floods causing a big loss of land estimated to 12 tonnes per year;
- Natural disasters and the degradation of natural resources such as water, forests and biological diversity compromising the people's living conditions;
- Loss of nutritive elements of the soil during the landslides causing acidification estimated to 45% of cultivated space;
- Diarrheic diseases and high respiratory infection rate;

As described above, the first factor of climate change is the deforestation related to the intensive and uncontrolled cutting of trees without a well-planned programme of planting more trees by stakeholders in Rwanda.

The Impact of war on climate change

The tree cutting was accelerated firstly during the period of war, which started in 1990 and continued during the 1994 genocide period. The situation became worse during the time of repatriation of both old case and new case Rwandan refugees. On top of the Rwandan refugees coming back home, Rwandan government had also to provide green spaces to the refugees hosted from neighbouring countries, still in war like the DRC Congo and Burundi.

For their repatriation and reintegration, the Rwandan authorities provided green spaces for shelters (imidugudu), and agriculture. A lot of trees were also intensively cut for fire, cooking, and commerce. In addition to the above, people were invested in cutting trees to burn and sell bricks, and charcoals.

After such a long period of uncontrolled deforestation probably from 1990-2003, Rwanda in general has suffered periods of droughts leading to a serious situation of famine especially in the eastern (Bugesera, Umutara and southern parts of it).

Since the one thousand hills remained almost naked, sudden rainfalls lead to landslides causing the destructions of shelters and crops and killing people especially in the north (a region which was previously considered as the food storage of the whole country).

Due to climate change some lakes like Cyohoha and Sake in the East dried up and the swamped areas that used to sustain the population during the dry season became unproductive.

The obvious results have been food shortages caused by poor crops, the deterioration of soil fertility on high lands and frequent floods on the low lands.

In brief, the genesis of the hunger, drought, and floods is deforestation and poor land management that have accelerated soil erosions on farming lands. Tons of soils are washed away by rainwater from the high lands causing floods, damage to infrastructure and destruction of crops due to bad cultivation habits. The fertility and productivity of soil has been considerably reduced in many parts of Rwanda due also to overgrazing contributing to land degradation.

II. Justification

The existing National environment policy in Rwanda puts much emphasis on good management of land at central and local levels following both the decentralisation and the good governance policy. That national environment policy comprises strategic options for people, land

management, the use of natural resources as well as other socio-economic factors. The church should not be left behind in these activities.

In addition, the poverty alleviation strategies constitute one of the key tools on which sustainable development should aim at, given that people should directly depend on natural resources. Given that poverty remains the dangerous enemy of the environment protection in Rwanda and since sources of revenues are limited, people have no other option except that of using natural resources such as land and forests to respond to their needs.

Furthermore, the search for commercial products derived from the trees (charcoals, firewoods, medicinal trees, food plants) has obviously contributed to deforestation. The majority of Rwandan households (96,2%) of the rural and urban areas use trees as source of energy and more than 60% of urban population use charcoal as source of energy in Rwanda. The delicate problem of deforestation with which Rwanda is confronted is due to the high demand of tree related products.

As the fight against environmental degradation is the response to the 7th Objective of Millenium Development Goal (MDGS), it is necessary to sensitize the population in general, the Christians, women and youth in particular on the important ecological problems weighing on human livelihood. It is also important to support local initiatives in order to encourage sustainable ways of using resources.

In the process of designing its strategic plan to overcome poverty, Rwanda has provided an important contribution to the promotion of the environment by requesting all stakeholders to vigorously involve themselves in tree planting.

To do so, the Government of Rwanda is aware that a good environment constitutes an important foundation for lasting development in the country. To support the good efforts of the government, CPR find it necessary and extremely important to engage in a sensitisation and mobilisation campaign within church parishes to integrate different activities related to environment conservation and promotion into church priorities. Based on the importance of trees and given the degradation of the environment in Rwanda in general and that of the forest in particular, churches have a big role to play in rehabilitating the forests to improve the quality of life of the people.

This programme of protecting, promoting, rehabilitating and fighting against climate change aims at **mobilising** both pastors and Christians in parishes on the issue of environmental degradation due to climate change. It also aims at **strengthening the capacity of the churches through education and sensitization workshops** so that parishes can put an important programme of **tree planting** in their priorities.

To encourage the parishes to mostly get involved in the action against the climate change, the Protestant Council of Rwanda, will provide a National **Award** for the three most performing parishes each year. The most performing will receive 1,500,000 Rwf each.

The monitoring of the progress made in this regard with parishes will be done by a Task Force to be set up by the Protestant Council of Rwanda. The Task Force will regularly monitor the project and determine the most performing parishes to be rewarded each year.

It is to be noted that protestant churches in general and the parishes in particular have not yet sufficiently felt and understood the importance of dealing with the environmental crisis as connected to the issue of climate change. CPR would then like, through this programme, to involve parishes with the objective of strengthening their commitment in the process of

sustainable development. We are saying that environment related problems should mobilise CPR member churches, church leaders, pastors and parishes more than ever.

In this programme, we are planning to organise 15 workshops for a 10.500 environmental activists including pastors, youth and women in the parishes. In addition to the above **training of pastors and Christians**, CPR parishes will involve in a wide programme of **establishing nurseries** and **planting trees** for a 3 years period of time. The planting of trees will contribute to protecting soil against erosion. It will also create jobs and generate income for Christians and parishes involved. There are 20 CPR member churches to involve in this project, especially the Association of Pentecostal churches in Rwanda, Presbyterian church in Rwanda, the 7th Day Adventist church, Free Methodist church, Baptist Union church, Association of Baptist churches, Nazarene church, Lutheran church, Evangelical church of Friends, the Salvation Army and the 9 Dioceses of the Anglican church in Rwanda.

III. Objectives

Major objective

In this project, CPR has the major objective of mobilizing and involving pastors and Christians within parishes in the process of protecting the environment and fighting against climate change for sustainable development in Rwanda. It also establishes a vigorous action of parishes in tree planting.

Specific objectives

- To create awareness on the problem of environmental degradation problem climate change so that measures can be taken to ensure food security;
- To educate church congregations on problems related to environment conservation and the importance of reducing pollution by minimizing the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers;
- To use media in creating awareness among the community at large
- To encourage Christians in parishes to establish nurseries of tree and fruit seedlings

IV. Activities

- To conduct 15 per year seminars in order to sensitize the church environmental activists including pastors, youth and women bringing together 105 Sectors;
- To establish 15 tree nurseries including fruit tree nurseries for 105 Sectors of Rwanda;
- To plant 1.000.000 trees per year, in open spaces starting with church land. Trees to be planted will be those recommended by the National authorities in charge of the environment;
- To distribute seedlings to the planters of trees in identified areas;
- To organise 10 radio broadcasts ;
- To draw up an environmental Charter which parishes should adhere to;
- To put in place a joint Task Force of parishes for action against climate change with the objective of establishing a vigorous action of parishes in order to build a strong initiative of protecting and rehabilitating the environment. The Task Force would also monitor the effectiveness of the churches in the project;
- To ensure the coordination of the project and produce both narrative and financial reports;

V. Implementation Time

This project will be implemented over a 7 year period beginning from the moment funds are available. The planting of trees will take place two times per year: in February - March then September - October of each year, preparatory works will be done such as distribution of seedlings. An evaluation will be done in the middle of the implementation process.

VI. Monitoring Strategies

- 15 workshops in sectors will be organised during which CPR and the identified experts in the environment will train pastors in charge of parishes and Christians in general on the current environmental crisis in Rwanda. This will help the beneficiaries of the current programme to initiate responsible actions.
- To provide a National award for the three most performing parishes each year;
- To regularly monitor the progress and the effectiveness of the activities in the programme;
- Use of media to sensitise community members on the issues related to climate change and environment;
- Use vulnerable peoples, members of parishes to plant trees thus allowing them to get an income within the context of poverty reduction.
- The implementation of this project will be done in collaboration with different public and private partners that have a common orientation, such as REMA, Agronomist of the Sectors in all districts, etc.

VII. Expected results

- 100 pastors and community leaders per sector and Christians (including women and youth) are trained and informed on the main challenges related to climate change and environment degradation in Rwanda;
- 30 tree nurseries are established;
- 1.000.000 trees are planted to forest open spaces;
- 1.000.000 tree seeds are distributed to the planters;
- An environmental charter is elaborated and adhered to by church parishes;
- A task force to fight against climate change and monitor the project is in place;
- Narrative and financial reports are properly produced and available on time;

IX. Indicators of the project

- The number of people with added knowledge in environment conservation.
- The number of people that promote and rehabilitate the environment by planting at least 10.000 trees per parish in 3 years.
- Environment protected by elaborated charter.
- 15 tree nurseries are established
- Reduced use of chemical as pesticides in farming activities;
- Reduced grazing in reserve areas.

X. Constraints

-Sometimes planted trees are not taken care off to grow in good condition. Much effort will be needed to ensure the security of the planted trees.

-Secondly, the coordination between government authorities and foresters, the government Board in charge of the environment and churches needs particular attention to get green spaces for trees plantation.

XI. Sustainability of the project

The activities will be carried out at parish level and at individual level in the farms. The people at the parish level will receive knowledge and will use that knowledge to raise nurseries and to plant trees. Parish members will plant trees and care for them till maturity. The knowledge acquired will continue to be used to sensitize the rest of the population for a number of years through seminars. The parish committees will continue to work together with local government authorities.