

## ARC statement on the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture

The world is experiencing two of the greatest environmental crises of its history: the mass extinction of species, which is underway now, and the growing catastrophe of climate change, which not only threatens all life on Earth but is already disrupting agriculture and will seriously impact our ability to feed ourselves in the next few decades.

Scientists have described the steady annihilation of vast numbers of species, an estimated 17,000 to 100,000 per year, as the planet's Sixth Extinction<sup>1</sup>, and say human activities are mainly to blame. The great swathe of environmental destruction wreaked by human hands over the last century includes massive habitat loss, ecosystem disruption, soil degradation and deforestation. Now added to this list is climate change, the greatest threat of all, which is already transforming life on Earth through warming temperatures, rising sea levels and shifting seasons.

Accelerating climate change combined with a rising global population and diminishing natural resources seriously threatens our ability to feed ourselves. This has grave implications for the world's most vulnerable communities, particularly those in ecologically fragile environments. It is they who will suffer most from the impact of climate change on agriculture, including smallholder farmers (many of them women) who produce the majority of the world's food. It is they who already suffer the biggest burden of hunger and malnutrition – even though the world produces enough food for all to eat.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that yields of staple crops such as wheat, rice and maize will fall by 25% by 2050 – a time when the world's population is expected to rise to nine billion. Most of the population increase will be in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, regions that are already suffering among the highest levels of poverty and malnutrition. How should we respond to these issues, as the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, as faith communities and as partners with the development and environmental movements?

### Joining the Global Alliance

As part of our response, and following a great deal of internal and external discussion, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation has decided to join the new Global Alliance for Climate-smart Agriculture during its inception year. There are a number of reasons why. First, all our partner faiths stress that our common humanity means we are called upon to relieve hunger and suffering wherever we can. We agree with the Global Alliance that 'ensuring food security and good nutrition for the world's population is one of our most pressing challenges', and that this has to be done in ways that are 'sustainable and equitable'.

Second, only a radical rethink of how we farm can protect the environment, enhance biodiversity and alleviate some of the habitat and species loss that is driving the Sixth Extinction while also increasing food production to meet the needs of the world's growing population.

Agriculture has a massive impact on the world's natural resources and makes a substantial contribution to the carbon emissions driving global warming. Helping farmers to produce more food in ways that do not damage the health of the soils, water and ecosystems, or accelerate climate change, or make smallholder farmers more vulnerable, must be supported by anyone seeking a fairer, more sustainable and equitable food and farming system.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sixth Extinction*, by Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin (Doubleday, 1995)

## A moral imperative

In this, we share, and bring with us, the motivation of our faith partners for whom ending hunger and suffering has been a moral imperative for thousands of years. All the major faiths regard food as a gift of the Divine to all humanity. All recognise the need to relieve suffering and seek justice for the oppressed. All accept that doing so requires an equitable distribution of resources – including natural resources. In the words of Pope Benedict on the 2010 World Day of Peace: *'The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations.'*

Our faith partners believe we have a responsibility to protect the Living Planet because it was created by a Loving Creator and reveals the presence of the Divine, whatever we perceive the Divine to be. The natural world does not belong to a minority of rich or powerful individuals or corporations. Nor does it exist simply to serve humanity through providing 'eco-system services' or other mechanistic roles. Instead, it is a manifestation of the Divine and is worth protecting for the sake of its own intrinsic value – including the fact that it is beautiful.

As the World Council of Churches said in 1988: *'Though human eyes may not always discern it, every creature and the whole creation in chorus bear witness to the glorious unity and harmony with which creation is endowed.'* Approximately 1,200 years earlier, the 8th century Shinto poet Urabe-no-Kanekuni put it this way: *'Even in a single leaf of a tree or a tender blade of grass, the awe-inspiring Deity manifests itself.'* And around 100 years before that, the Prophet Muhammad taught: *'The world is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you His guardian over it.'*

## Faithful Farming

ARC's faith partners are promoting more sustainable forms of agriculture. In sub-Saharan Africa, ARC is working with Christian communities who are practicing Farming God's Way, a faith-based approach that integrates Biblical teachings on caring for creation with practical training in conservation agriculture techniques.

Following requests from our Muslim partners, ARC launched the first conservation agriculture manual specifically designed for Muslim farmers in Kenya in March 2014. Islamic Farming has been greeted with enthusiasm by Muslim farmers in East Africa, and demand to know more about it is spreading fast. Elsewhere faith groups are endorsing sustainable forms farming as part of a faith commitment to caring for the Earth. In China, for example, Daoists are using organic methods to grow herbs for traditional Chinese medicine as part of a major move to promote organic farming, and 11 villages in Zhejiang Province are converting to sustainable agriculture in a joint Daoist/Confucianist project.

## ARC's role in the Alliance

How will these views, priorities and principles shape ARC's input into the Alliance? We broadly support the Alliance's three aspirational outcomes:

- Sustainable and equitable increases in agricultural productivity and incomes.
- Greater resilience of food systems and farming livelihoods.
- Reduction and/or removal of greenhouse gas emissions associated with agriculture (including the relationship between agriculture and ecosystems), where possible.

However, we believe the third aspiration must not conflict with the first two, or increase the vulnerability of smallholder farmers, and we feel the emphasis on protecting nature needs strengthening, not just because of its utility to human beings but because of the integrity of nature per se.

## Definition of climate-smart agriculture

We share the concerns expressed by a variety of civil society organisations that the term 'climate-smart agriculture' is not defined in the Global Alliance's Framework Document. Let us state our position clearly.

- We support forms of sustainable agriculture that seek to enhance productivity, improve livelihoods, treat livestock with respect and compassion and increase resilience to climate change while also working to protect the health of the soil, water and ecosystems.
- We do not support practices that result in greater environmental destruction, increase the vulnerability of smallholder farmers, cause unnecessary suffering to farm animals, reduce crop diversity or damage soil, water and ecosystems.
- We do not support policies that result in land grabbing or loss of smallholder farmers' land or rights: that includes potential moves to expand large-scale industrial agriculture to capitalise on soil carbon mitigation/sequestration initiatives.
- We do not support agriculture practices that are heavily reliant on chemical pesticides, fungicides and insecticides, growth promoters or artificial fertilisers.

There is as yet no consensus among faith groups regarding use of genetic modification/engineering (GM) for crops. Some regard it as striking at the integrity of life itself; others have concerns about the control that the patenting of seeds gives to corporations; many have not yet voiced a position.

ARC remains to be convinced by claims that GM crops will solve world hunger. We are concerned about the potential impact of GM crops on biodiversity and wildlife. We are uneasy about the fact that the majority of GM crops are controlled by three biotech companies and concerned about the impact such a power imbalance may have on smallholder farmers. For that reason we do not support GM; instead we call for greater efforts into conventional crop science, promoting agricultural biodiversity and soil health, and supporting smallholder farmers.

## Membership criteria

We also share the concerns expressed by some civil society organisations about the lack of membership criteria for the Global Alliance. We understand the desire to remain an open forum at this stage but the lack of membership criteria does inevitably create the fear that the interests of big business will trump those of smallholder farmers and that the Alliance will be used to promote practices that are damaging to the environment, ecosystems and local cultures.

In considering all these questions, in the end we had to decide whether to remain engaged in this new global initiative or stand outside the Alliance. We believe the launch of the Global Alliance, with its stated aspirations of *sustainable and equitable* increases in agricultural productivity and incomes, *greater resilience* of food systems and farming livelihoods, and reducing agriculture's contribution to climate change, offers an extraordinary and vital opportunity to transform agriculture across the world. It is one we must seize – for the benefit of people, the natural world and the planet, and for our common future.

We join the Alliance in a spirit of hope, faith and anticipation. We remain optimistic that some of the concerns of civil society will be addressed during its inception year. We stand ready to contribute what we can – and to speak out as a participating member if, in our view, the Alliance diverts from the honorable intentions with which we believe it has been founded.