

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH COMMITMENT PAPER ON THE ALLIANCE FOR RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION PROJECT

BACKGROUND:

One major issue of great concern in our 21st Century is the phenomenon of the ill-effect of Climate Change. When God finished with his creation, he looked at everything he had created and said it was very good. Humans were then given the responsibility to take care of the created order but messed it up in the discharge of the expected stewardship responsibility down the centuries especially in the last century and the present. The result of our collective irresponsibility is seen in every region of the world and more so in the countries of the South.

Ghana, a nation on the West Coast of Africa is greatly affected by the negative effects of injurious Climate Change. The problems associated with the adverse effects of climate change in Ghana like the rest of Africa is already obvious in the following areas:

- Poor and erratic rainfall pattern which is very unpredictable and as a result affecting good agricultural practices.
- Poor yield and harvest of agricultural produce with serious implications for health and education.
- Mass movement of people from the rural agricultural settlements to the urban centres of the country in search of other job avenues.
- Poor and unacceptable mining practices that are leading to massive land degradation. Former arable lands are gradually being destroyed because of illegal and unacceptable mining methods.
- Deforestation especially through the activities of timber companies and chain saw operators. As a result the forest areas are being turned into savannah regions. Changes in the distribution of tree species are in turn having an impact on biological diversity (biodiversity).
- Desertification and Pollution of river bodies are greatly harming humans as well as other ecosystems.
- Excessive pollution of the atmosphere by the excessive fumes from imported second hand vehicles and increase in temperature.
- Increased flooding, sea erosion of the coastal belt, rising sea levels, intrusion of seawater into freshwater areas and the loss of wetlands.
- In effect, climate change has directly and indirectly exacerbated the incidence of poverty. One notable effect of these occurrences on health is malnutrition which is occasioned by crop failure, resulting in low and poor yields. The economy of the state is therefore greatly affected.

The EPC is accordingly making every effort within her means to help mitigate the ill-effects of climate change through the proper sensitisation of the populace on good practices related for example to the emission of Carbon dioxide, restriction on the importation of second hand vehicles, erection of sea defence walls, education and training sessions on good farming and mining practices.

The Agenda 21 Programme within the EPC setup was therefore tasked to prepare a concept paper on the environmental project they were undertaking for example in Northern Ghana under

the supervision of the 3 agricultural stations at Yendi, Chereponi and Saboba. This became necessary in 2005/2006, when the All African Conference of Churches, headquartered in Nairobi invited the **E.P.Church** through its Agenda 21 Programme to submit a paper on any environmental conservation project they might be undertaking. The purpose was to recommend such project to a partner that was interested for support in the future through the AACC.

Of particular interest to the EPC was the forest conservation component that sought to re-forest degraded lands due to bush burning, charcoal production and tree-felling. A project proposal was, therefore, prepared that sought to address the specific concern of land degradation through a re-forestation project by planting trees and educating and assisting the affected communities to engage in other income- generating activities with the main aim of weaning them off the harmful practice of bush burning and charcoal production.

THE PROJECT

The project has 4 main objectives and components:

1. To re-generate about 30% of forest cover in degraded areas through the establishment of woodlots of at least 10 acres in every project community.
2. To introduce alternative livelihood- i.e. mushroom farming, snail and grass-cutter rearing and bee- keeping to 60% of unemployed youth and women
3. To encourage the adaptation of energy conservation practices in heating to 60% of women and households through the use of locally produced energy-efficient stoves.
4. To reduce the incidence of bush fires by 50% through the training of fire volunteers

Education and awareness creation on the need to conserve forest resources among all target groups is cross-cutting and will be done as an integral part of all the interventions.

This proposal was completed and sent to the AACC in 2007. Fortunately early this year enquiries came through the AACC from the **Alliance for Religions and Conservation** to find out whether or not the E.P. Church was still interested in the project.

The E.P. Church through its leadership remains committed to their continued interest in the project and requests that action be expedited to enable the project take advantage of the impending major raining seasons especially in the North of Ghana. The EPC project was subsequently handed over to the Inter- Power and Light Ministries in the United States for possible funding. We still await a positive response for the project from the funding partners.

The church is always ready to act beyond the pulpit and reach the congregations at the grassroots with the climate change message. The theme of climate change needs to be

integrated into our worship, liturgy, preaching and also integrated into the curricula of our theological institutions.

We are committed to establishing eco-congregations at all levels under our jurisdiction and also engage our government through the Christian Council of Ghana for policy formulation and implementation to mitigate the effects of climate change at all levels. Advocacy is another strategic tool that we can deploy, as a faith institution, in the communication of basic information on climate change to rural communities.

TRACK RECORD OF THE E.P.CHURCH ON CLIMATE CHANGE INTERVENTIONS:

It's worthy to note that the **E.P. Church** through its **Agenda 21 Programme** launched a successful poverty reduction project in Northern Ghana in the year 2000. That project had 3 components which were in the areas of

- Nutrition
- Sanitation
- Environment

Under the environment component we retrieved over 25 acres of degraded land through re-forestation by massive planting of trees by the year 2005, and trained over 125 fire volunteers in collaboration with the Ghana National Fire Service. This evidence was requested for and sent to the ARC. But for the reduction and cessation of donor funds, more acreage would have been conserved.

We are currently in the process of working with 4 communities in the Chereponi area of Northern Ghana to establish a total of 4 acres of woodlots in the communities through support from the Bremen Mission Micro-Project Scheme. Land conservation through re-forestation projects is therefore not new or alien to the **E.P. Church Development Programme**.

The **E.P. Church** will therefore seize any opportunity that might come its way to conserve degraded lands through re-forestation intervention and income generating activities. The church is credited with intervening in poor, marginalised and vulnerable communities in Ghana and assisting rural communities as part of its social responsibility and call.

CONCLUSION

We need to harness our resources together and collaborate in the sharing of information on good practices that will help to preserve our endangered environment. Joint application of appropriate technologies that can help to mitigate the negative effects of climate change should be worked out. We can also help by providing advocacy work that will make it unacceptable for the South, for example, to be designated as a dumping ground for toxic waste from the North.

The **E.P.CHURCH** is therefore positioned to deliver on this new partnership with the Alliance for Religions and Conservation/ Inter-faith Power and Light Ministries who are interested in developing eco-twinning projects with congregations in Africa as part of a '**carbon covenant**' project and as their contribution towards addressing the ill-effects of **Climate Change**.