

AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GHANA Long-term plan on the environment – summary

INTRODUCTION

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana has 150,000 members and works in 147 districts with 834 congregations and 450 pastors. It runs 970 schools (from kindergartens to high schools) as well as a university and two colleges of education. It runs sanitation clubs in basic and secondary schools in Northern Ghana and promotes the solar disinfection of water project in schools and rural communities.

The EPC also works through the Religious Bodies Network on Climate Change (Relbonet) in Ghana, a new interfaith partnership for advocacy in Ghana set up in 2010 to include faith-based organisations in national consultations on climate change. Members include 13 major mainline Protestant, Pentecostal and Charismatic religious bodies, Ghana's three major Muslim organisations and the Federation of Muslim Women Associations. Relbonet reaches more than five million Ghanaians every week. EPC hosts the national secretariat of the Network and this brings huge potential to disseminate climate change and environmental messages.

In 2002, the EPC launched an environmental protection project in Northern Ghana where land degradation is severe, resulting in an increased threat of desertification. This involved tree planting, creating 100 acres of reforested woodlots and alternative livelihood training to rural farmers to combat excessive harvesting of trees and shrubs for firewood.

A long-term plan of environment action was presented to the ARC Windsor Celebration in November 2009. This was one of the projects chosen by US-based Interfaith Power and Light as part of its Internet 'Carbon Covenant' project, where members in America are encouraged to offset their carbon footprint by supporting faith-based environmental projects in Africa.

In 2010, the EPC won the Ghana National Environment Day Award and the Ghana National Farmers' Day Environment Award.

In 2011, the Church at its 3rd Annual General Assembly (its highest legislative body) officially adopted a policy on environment and climate change. This policy mandates all the structures of the church to undertake environmental and climate change projects to protect God's creation. The church now aims to become the foremost 'green' religious institution in Ghana.

The EPC is participating in drawing up the ARC/Kenyan Organization for Environmental Education toolkit for faith schools. Along with the UK NGO Tree Aid, the Church organised two training workshops on agroforestry in 2012 sponsored by ARC and attended by representatives from Relbonet. As a direct result, a Relbonet working party was set up in Northern Ghana to plant 20,000 tree seedlings during the next rainy season. It includes the Muslim community in Northern Ghana – the first time they have been involved in such activities. The Roman Catholic Church in Northern Ghana has also pledged to join the initiative and plant 5,000 tree seedlings. In addition, the EPC is now

setting up two new nurseries in Southern Ghana.

The Church's seven-year plan of action on the environment was developed through wide consultation within the structures of the EPC including seminars with 15 different Church groups from education institutions to pastors, and from youth groups and women's groups. The EPC also consulted with government agencies and NGOs such as the Forestry Commission, university, and government ministries. The EP Church will collaborate with Relbonet to successfully implement the following long-term plan commitments:

AWARENESS CREATION

The EPC, with Relbonet, will carry out awareness creation on climate change, environmental protection and conservation issues in over 10,000 congregations through religious outreach activities, radio and other media programmes, seminars and workshops, church harvests and celebrations and social mobilisation networks (internet, SMS, pager, blogs).

EDUCATION

The EPC, with Relbonet, will undertake the formation of 1,000 eco-clubs and 1000 ecocongregations to spearhead education on environmental issues especially climate change in schools, communities, churches, mosques and temples. In 2011 it ran a two-day training workshop for teachers on the formation of eco-clubs in schools and eco-clubs have now been formed in 10 basic schools. Members of eco-clubs are taught basic environmental studies, basic agricultural skills and water harvesting techniques as well as personal hygiene and sanitation.

AGRICULTURE (FOOD AND FARMING)

Provide land, teach and practice sustainable land management in EPC schools, agriculture college and rural training programmes. Introduce conservation agriculture to six EPC rural farmer programmes and four new communities. Teach and practice organic farming methods. Train 3000 fire volunteers to protect forests and farms.

NUTRITION

Grow moringa oleifera trees and soya beans as high protein sources and introduce these into rural training programmes and schools and into school feeding programmes.

WATER AND SANITATION

Teach water-harvesting technology in religious schools and rural communities. Harvest water from schools and chapel/mosque roofs and construct large water storage tanks. Introduce solar water disinfection technology to rural villages and towns. Provide toilet facilities in religious and public schools (especially for girls) in selected rural communities. Teach hand washing after use of toilet facilities. Form sanitation clubs in basic and junior high schools. Undertake watershed management activities around local river sources and banks.

TREE PLANTING AND AGROFORESTRY

In collaboration with Relbonet and the Forestry Commission, plant seven million trees involving congregations and student eco-clubs. Mobilise parishioners in nine presbyteries and 10,000 Christian and Muslim congregations to undertake tree planting. Establish 10 major nurseries in all six programmes and four new communities. Women will make up 50% of nursery attendants and supervisors in all nurseries. Establish school farms, gardens and woodlots to serve as demonstration facilities for pupils. Offer agroforestry training at

all six agriculture stations and to religious leaders, community leaders and teachers of schools and eco-congregations. Collaborate with the Forestry Services in Tamale, Northern Ghana, to reforest a degraded Forest Reserve allocated to Relbonet.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Provide fuel-efficient local stoves to rural farmers. Procure and distribute 5,000 solar lanterns to farmers and fishermen. Introduce the usage of solar dryers in villages and small towns.

This plan is endorsed by the Standing Committee of the General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. This Church Executive is headed by the Moderator of the EPC, Rt Rev Francis Amenu. It is also endorsed by the Management team and Board of Relbonet.

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