

Forests and Trees

Overview:

The faiths are major landowners – they own 7-8% of habitable land surface of the planet and 5% of forestry. So it's no surprise to see that forests and trees play a big role in roughly half the long-term action plans on the environment, particularly in countries already experiencing the devastating effects of climate change. One of the most significant initiatives to come out of Windsor Celebration 2009 was the proposal to create an international religious forestry standard for the management of sacred or faith-held forests. Led by the Shinto of Japan, this will be launched at a conference in China in Hua Shan in October 2010.

Other initiatives range from large-scale tree planting schemes aimed at addressing serious deforestation to plans to plant more trees around places of worship. These include the 8.5 million trees to be planted in community forests across the Kilimanjaro region by the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania; one million trees to be planted by the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon; and 200,000 trees to be planted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana in four areas as well as a further 100,000 seedlings to create community woodlands.

Others, such as the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, the Daoists, the Church of South India and the Polish Orthodox Church, are planting trees to 'green' church land, or, like the Sikhs, are urging their followers to plant trees themselves. The Jewish plan includes a proposal to expand Tu B'shvat, New Year for the trees, into a modern environmental celebration.

Others, such as the Shinto, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, are promoting the sustainable use of forests for fuel and to maintain biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes, and encouraging alternatives to charcoal.

Following are some extracts taken from the faiths' long-term action plans in which they mention forests and trees. This is not complete but gives a strong flavour of the breadth of interest in this topic. For the plans in full, please visit www.arcworld.org

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Christian

Alexandria and All Africa

- a) For every effort to have substantial results, it has to have the parish as its centre. With the initiatives of the parishes or the Holy Archdioceses, projects of collection of goods for recycling can begin (paper, glass objects, aluminum, etc.) and exemplary use can be made of recycled material which is environmentally friendly. The parish can also play a leading part in reforestations, tree planting in the cities, in the cleaning of specific places and in other activities that contribute actively to the protection of the natural environment. They can also react against ecological disasters or to those activities which contribute, in one way or another, to the polluting and destroying of the natural environment.(12)

Vineyard

¹ For example, the missions director for the Great Lakes Region of Vineyard USA, Ross Naylor-Tatterson, has been leading a church planting movement in Indonesia, which has assisted in reforesting and the planting of rubber trees to help the local economy. Pastor Naylor-Tatterson has agreed to advocate for including environmental care in the missions strategy of the national missions task force on which he serves.

Armenian

As a part of its strategic plan to overcome poverty, the Republic of Armenia prioritised the country's recent environmental challenges as follows:

- (i) Efficient use of forest resources,

3) In the neighbourhood of Lake Sevan there are 10-14 villages with 20,000 inhabitants, consisting in the main of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan, and supplied by the diocese of Gegharkunik. If solar powered heating systems are introduced in a few public locations here (such as kindergartens, public baths etc.), not only it will cut sizable expenses in this economically poor and disadvantaged region, but will also prevent the tree cutting in the forests, thus boosting the forestation in the country.

Since trees symbolise life, their careful maintenance can be viewed as a very special duty for every Christian, and an act pleasing to God. The tree-planting mission, then, can be one of the main involvements of the Church in overcoming the acute deforestation problem and negative consequences of both land erosion and water retention in Armenia. The planting of trees around monasteries and churches is traditional in Armenia. The former is of utmost importance because more than 10 per cent of the forest was cut down or thinned during the energy crisis of the early 1990s in Armenia. As a result there is an urgent need for the advocacy of responsible stewardship and for strengthening the communal management of forests.

The theoretical studies on green theology were followed by practical work of the future clergy in the framework of the “Tree of Life” project of Armavir Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The tree planting activity was organised in the garden of St. Lazarus Church in the town of Metsamor. The project in Metsamor represents the example of practical lessons in environmental education in a town that does not yet have established community traditions or linkages with the church. The garden, located in an arid region with very small green areas, will hopefully serve as an example for the neighbouring farms and communities.

Thanks to this project the Church of St. Lazarus is now surrounded by five hectares of the newly planted fruit garden. Having ensured uninterrupted water supply by the WCC-ART, the main problem of irrigation was successfully resolved.

The project demonstrated the successful cooperation of the Church, NGOs, the community, and ecumenical organisations, thus setting an example for others. The trees were provided by the Armenia Tree Project NGO, which also designed several dendrological plans for churches, including but not limited to St. Anna in Malishka, Mughni Church, Amenaprkich in Musaler, Asdvadsatsin in Yeghegnadzor, St. Trdat in Vaik and others, as well as 680 trees, shrubs and evergreens at the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, etc.

2) Restoration of sacred green spaces: During the days of the Catholics of All Armenians Nerses the 5th, there used to be a historic forest and a small lake close to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Since the city was in the centre of a very dry region with particularly hot summers, it was the only green area in the neighbourhood. Waters from the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, which once had more than 80 wells in its vicinity, irrigated the forest. Furthermore, in the early 20th Century, the forest became a graveyard for the thousands of orphan refugees from Western Armenia who were rescued from genocide, and continued to exist until the early 1990s. Unfortunately, however, most of the trees were cut down during the afore-mentioned energy crisis.

The territory was no longer under the management of the church and no replanting activities were put in place by the regional administration.

Recently, the Church has acquired the administration of this plot, covering close to 8.5 hectares. A small part of the forest was used to construct a playground for children. There is also a plan to replant the forest in the spring of 2010 and erect a monument dedicated to the child victims of the Armenian Genocide. The green area will serve as a restful, relaxation spot for the Echmiadzin citizens and Holy Church visitors. A steering committee was established to prepare the project and the budget. The current plan is to have approvals in place for the completed project by the end of the year, so as to allow planting works to commence in the spring of 2010. This will be part of a bigger plan to plant 1.5 million trees in different regions in Armenia in the memory of the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide.

As a part of its ethics the Church takes some measures to promote ecologically lean life. For instance, the church holidays and celebration of creation day can be opportunities for advocating the responsible community management of the surrounding nature – forests, meadows etc.

The Mother Church has around 4.9 hectares of land plot, two hectares of which ought to be green. On the 1st of May 2009, a tree planting session was carried out. This notwithstanding, so much still needs to be done to implement the comprehensive green-design of the plot. The negotiations for securing finance have been initiated, looking to begin the project in the spring of 2010.

The most costly parts of the project are the preparation of the land plot (as the area is covered with construction waste and stones) and, owing to the dry climate in that region, that irrigation system must be installed. The preparatory works will be followed by tree and bush planting by volunteer students from surrounding Universities. The students from the Theology faculty will then take care of the area for the first three years so that the newly planted trees may become deeply rooted and sufficiently strong to survive. The success of this project will enable the group to ensure its expansion, and to include other Churches around the country.

Presbyterian Church of Cameroon

Strategic Direction for Action

I. Adaptation to Climate Change Impacts

- Tree Planting and agro forestry techniques
- Community forest development

III. Sustainable Development

- Seed multiplication (trees, fishing, etc)
- Economic use of non timber forest products (apiary etc)

Regeneration of Natural Resource Extraction → Advocate for the implementation of tree planting by logging companies → Number of Logging Companies planting trees → 2010 – 2017 → Synod Officers and Communication department shall facilitate process
Partners interested are identified

Promote sustainable harvesting of trees for fuel

Community Forest Development	1.1 Identify ecologically endangered communities	1.1 Number of communities identified	2010 -2012	Consultancy	
	1.2 Support Community forest conservation initiatives	1.2 Number of community forests	2013 -2015	Development department	
	1.3 Develop Community forest Management teams and networks	1.3 Number of management teams and networks	2013 -2015	Development department	

Tree Planting & Agro Forestry	1.1 Design national tree planting map & identify species for different ecological zones	1. A tree planting manual is produced	2010 - 2012
	1.2 Plant 1,000,000 trees in communities nationwide	1.2 Number of trees planted	2012 – 2017
	2.1 Promote agro forestry techniques	2.1 Number of persons involved in agro forestry	2010 – 2017
	3.1 Develop partnership with NGOs & governmental agencies in the tree planting sector	3.1 Number of partnerships on tree planting	2010 - 2017

Seed Multiplication	1.1 Identify and train Communities on tree nursery development	Number of persons in communities trained	2010-2017
	1.2 Identify variety of tree seedlings for different ecological zones	Number of tree species identified	2011-2017
	1.3 Establish tree nurseries in Communities in different ecological zones	Number of tree nurseries established	2010-2017
	1.4 Identify and develop variety of fish species for fish farmers	Number of fish species developed	2010-2017
	1.5 Promote horticulture among youths in communities	Number of youths involved in horticulture	2012-2016

<p>Tree Planting / Agro-forestry</p> <p>Operation Green: Plant a Tree now! (A tree planting project already developed)</p>	<p>Presbyterian Rural Training Centre (PRTC) Fonta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PCC Development department - PCC movements (women, men and youths) - PCC Congregations - NGOs and governmental agencies 	<p>2010 – 2017</p>	<p>This will significantly reduce carbon</p> <p>Currently we are in the process of working out a partnership on tree planting with Interfaith Power and light as well as with a local governmental agency -ANAFOR</p>
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Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

- Lands and forests: Religious communities of men and women in the United States have made care of creation a top priority on the land and in the facilities they own. For many, this priority has helped them become models for the local communities that surround them.

For example, the primary meeting and meals facility at the retreat center of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary near San Jose, California, is a LEED-certified (Leadership in Environmental and Educational Design) building. The Coalition will promote such efforts and work with facilities managers to ensure that these best practices are seen as models to be replicated.

Church of Norway

As a petroleum producer and a manager of enormous incomes from this production, Norway has a particular responsibility. This responsibility must have the effect:

...that considerable amounts of money be spent on immediate measures, as preventing the deforestation of areas with tropical rain forest.

Church of England

“When the Septuagesima collect [prayer used in the late winter before Lent] speaks of our justly being punished for our offences we know that they now include the destruction of forests and fish- stocks, huge evils for which in many small ways we may be to blame ...”

- By 2015 for 2016-2050, *StF* will develop a rigorous basis for reporting on reduction of ecological footprints, and criteria for choosing or setting up offsetting schemes especially by tree planting.

4. *Shrinking the Footprint* will encourage tree-planting and other actions to enhance biodiversity on church land.

In addition, the range of very high quality guidance and resources which exist on the protection and management of churchyard trees needs to be better integrated and disseminated, through national and diocesan websites. This includes guidance on trees by diocesan chancellors under the *Care of Churches etc Measure, 1991*.

The UK Yew Guardianship Project encourages the protection and care of Britain’s ancient yews. With the Ancient Yew Group (AYG) the Conservation Foundation has printed a Code of Care for parishes, land owners and local authorities. In 2005 the Foundation contributed towards the Ancient Yew Group’s (AYG) Ancient Yew Gazetteer website, which will continue updating the distribution of ancient yews throughout the UK.

- **Exeter: ‘Roots of the Cathedral’** This DVD project, based on a concept by Christopher Southgate, brings together the work of Robert Harris (Architect), Peter Kyrke-Smith (Composer) and Andrew Millington with singing by the Cathedral Choir. In sound and image, the project highlights the ecological link between humanity and the natural world, the connectedness between natural beauty and human endeavour, a spiritual perspective of God's total creation.

The project looks in particular at the influence of trees on the life and history of Exeter Cathedral. Woodland and trees provided raw materials for all ancient buildings and the tools required in their construction; they stimulated architects and masons in roof design, pillars, vaulting and bosses; the canopy of the forest is reflected in the vaulting and arches.

Wakefield

Since 2008, the Wakefield Diocese and parishes have their own dedicated carbon offsetting scheme by means of tree planting in the Diocese's link diocese of Mara in Tanzania.

The diocesan website contains a theological statement on the reasons for concern about the environment and climate change, encouragement to parishes to take part in *Eco-congregation*, and a range of other practical help and resources.

Church of South India

Plant Trees and Manage Communal Land: The members of Church of South India will plant as many trees as they can to improve the green cover. Forests are one of the most effective carbon sinks and critical for preserving the ecological balance. Besides other plants, emphasis will be given in promoting the planting of Vetiver, Jatropha and Mangroves. These three plants are all ecologically significant, especially in the context of Global warming and the shortage of groundwater. The proposal to promote their planting in all lands touched by CSI has been accepted and if any Dioceses would like to plant the above the plants in a massive scale, funding will be given. In addition the Director of BDM has agreed to provide necessary assistance to the dioceses to prepare a project report and simultaneously will also explore possibilities of providing financial assistance from different agencies for other planting programmes. In June 2009, the CSI Synod urged all its 4 million members to plant at least one tree during the month of June 2009. This was linked to the UN Environment Programme's tree-planting initiative. It also urged individual parishes to manage their churchyards to benefit wildlife eg through planning a Nature Trail pointing out different trees, plants, wildlife, and stone used in the building and gravestones.

Dornakal Diocese is located in 5 revenue districts in Andhra Pradesh, one in Orissa and one in Madhya Pradesh. It is covered with thick forests, mountains, rivers and fields. Bishop Thandrigaru has instructed educational institutions to plant trees at their institutions and also at Church premises. Now our Churches are green. For example at Cathedral and Kothagudem it has grown a beautiful garden in front of the Church. We are planning to have gardens in all the Churches. There are two Hospitals in our Diocese covered with gardens and trees. We are thankful to our Bishop for encouraging the Diocese to be a green Diocese, for educating people to avoid the use of plastics and to use paper bags, and for educating the people to use the VermiComposite in agricultural

fields and not to waste water. A rainwater harvesting project has been proposed and is planned before the 2010 monsoon. Three Diocesan Compassion hostels were furnished with solar panels in 2009. There are a total of 20 such hostels in the Diocese, and each is now offering the slogan “each one plant one tree” – along with the degree college, the Junior college and six schools.

Madurai Ramanad Dicoese Eco clubs in Schools and Colleges, training programmes for teachers, competitions in eco-painting, eco-drawing, eco-essays etc. Tree planting and Ecological Sunday.

Nandyal Diocese has created a Partnership with the Korean Church in planting coconut trees, promoting partnerships in other areas.

Franciscan

Put together a data-base of best practices of the Franciscan family

A data-base of good practice will be invaluable for both the family and wider community. For example, our eco-pastoral work in Indonesia with local farmers, tree planting in Kenya, our work in the Amazon and with fish farming in Democratic Republic of Congo have all produced good results which will act as an inspiration and guide to others.

Presbyterian Church of Ghana

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 EP 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.

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.

COMMITMENTS

The Church is committed to help mitigate the effects of climate change:

- It will continue to raise awareness about climate change in its congregations with particular emphasis on the need to conserve forest resources. It will use its schools, radio discussions and public meetings to help achieve this. It will target rural church communities to communicate basic information on climate change.

- It will continue the work of the Church's Agenda 21 programme to restore degraded land through reforestation in Northern Ghana and the training of fire volunteers in collaboration with the Ghana National Fire Service to reduce the incidence of bush fire.
- It will support this work by coming into partnership with the US-based Interfaith Power and Light Campaign and its new eco-twinning project. Here, congregations in America will support faith-based environmental projects in Africa. Agenda 21 will manage the proposed one year project which centres on reforesting degraded lands in four project sites in Northern and Southern Ghana as well as establishing community woodlots. It aims to:
 - * Hold public meetings to create awareness of the need to manage and use environmental resources on a sustainable basis;
 - * Establish community woodlots to meet wood fuel demands and provide training in the manufacture of energy efficient stoves;
 - * Train around 200 firefighter volunteers;
 - * Plant 200,000 seedlings in degraded areas and plant 100,000 seedlings in community woodlots;
 - * Encourage co-operation with government and NGO agencies and the Church to work together for the protection of the environment... including the Forest Services Division, the Ghana National Fire Service and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

Polish Orthodox

2. Educational activities directed to children and youth should include:

- a) Broader and more active participation of Orthodox children in cleaning forest actions organised by schools. Additional forest cleaning actions organised by clergy, catechists, parish branches of the FOY in Poland;

5. Sacred Hill of Grabarka and Sts Mary and Martha Convent there, Suprasl, Krynoczka/Bialoweza, Piatienka are a kind of local mini-eco-systems. Orthodox churchyards and courtyards (*pogost*) have always been considered sacred area/ground and Orthodox churches have usually been surrounded by several large trees providing shelter for birds. In recent years a number of large trees have been cleared off several churchyards in Eastern Poland due to their age and bad condition. Replacement of the trees should occur ASAP.

The World Day of Prayer for Creation initiated by Ecumenical Patriarch should become an occasion for deeper concentration on the natural environment. Its celebration should be accompanied by meetings, seminars, symposia as well as practical conservation oriented actions – i.e. planting trees and/or shrubs around newly constructed churches, on churchyards, parish grounds and elsewhere.

Lutheran Church of Tanzania

Specific Objectives for the project are as follows:

To restore and conserve forests all over Kilimanjaro Region, emphasizing water conserving trees around water sources.

Alongside other activities, afforestation which is the main activity is expected to achieve planting of 8.5 million trees as community forests during the plan period.

SUSTAINABILITY

The project will be implemented in communities around Parishes. The afforestation component will have to do exclusively with agro-forestry, involving community households planting trees in and around their farms. It is expected that the conservation zeal developed by the project will be maintained by a generation passing this civilized practice on to the next.

<p>2. There are persistent forest fires around Mt. Kilimanjaro</p>	<p>1. Educate communities regarding harmful effects of forest destruction 2. Introduce non-fire means for extracting forest honey 3. Communities around forests to be involved in forest conservation.</p>
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KILIMANJARO SITUATION

<p>1. There is excessive felling of trees for burning charcoal and firing clay bricks. There is also growing demand for wooden coffins.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Popularize use of economic charcoal and charcoal stoves 2. Popularize use of cookers which use saw dust and coffee and rice husks 3. Popularize installation of biogas systems 4. Making available electricity and LPG at affordable prices 5. Educate communities regarding harmful effects of reckless tree felling 6. Road construction contracts to require contractors to plant at least as many trees as they fell along the way. 7. Sensitize communities to do away with coffins for burial. Cloth+ mats made from organic matter should suffice. This was the practice in the past.
<p>2. There are persistent forest fires around Mt. Kilimanjaro</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educate communities regarding harmful effects of forest destruction 2. Introduce non-fire means for extracting forest honey 3. Communities around forests to be involved in forest conservation.
<p>3. There is Farming and grazing at many water sources</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Laws should be observed and made to work
<p>4. No emphasis on planting water-conserving trees</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educate communities on planting water conserving tree species

<p>2. The tradition of Pastors organizing annual tree-planting in parishes is no more.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set aside a yearly tree-planting day for the parish, usually just before or on the onset of annual rains. Could be Saturday following Good Friday.
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To restore and conserve forests all over Kilimanjaro Region, emphasizing water conserving trees around water sources.

- Establish 152 tree nurseries [1 per Parish]
- Distribute seedlings
- Monitor planting and care

<p>To introduce and popularize economic charcoal/firewood cookers and alternative sources of cooking energy to gradually take the place of charcoal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstration of existing technology - Introduce new technology
<p>To advocate for availability of electricity, LPG and natural gas for domestic use, at popular prices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To educate on LPG/Natural gas use and demonstrate economy over charcoal
<p>To popularize non-wood based construction material</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the building materials - Promote non-wood building materials
<p>To introduce and popularize non-wood alternatives in the firing of clay-brick kilns. (Coffee and rice husks, also sawdust)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote existing alternatives - Introduce new alternatives
<p>To introduce and popularize burials which neither use wooden coffins, nor graves constructed by cement bricks and mortar.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate environmental impact
<p>To introduce and popularize forest honey harvesting techniques to replace fire.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote existing alternatives - Introduce new alternatives

This undesirable trend of environmental destruction must be reversed, with each country and region having a contribution to make. This project is Kilimanjaro's effort to put right what has gone wrong and convert into an environment conserving region. Massive tree planting for example will reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide particularly if the rest of the country and countries in the international community take measures which will control emission of gases into the atmosphere.

The project which is estimated to cost USD 2.5 Million will plant at the minimum 8.5million trees during the plan period, across the region. A department of the environment will be introduced into the structure of the Church in the Diocese to implement the project.

Daoist

We recommend Daoist temples to plant trees and other vegetation with a specific plan to protect old and well-known trees. We also call for a better use of green places and resources around Daoist temples. In connection with specific Daoist methods and practices on how to keep in good health, we will guide tourists and visitors to better understand beautiful nature and ecology systems during their times of relaxation and entertainment – for example, in the form of meditation sites and pathways through the woodlands and forests. We have already opened up such places in a few temples. From 2012 onwards we will promote this practice in the grounds of suitable Daoist temples across the country.

Sacred land: We will actively cooperate with forest and tourist organisations to hold activities that will help protect our Daoist sacred mountains

Jewish

Afforestation Policy. It should be noted that this is, on the whole, a significant success of Israeli environmental policy. The State of Israel is the only country in the world with a positive tree balance over the past century. The methods by which this was accomplished could be exported to other countries struggling with deforestation.

Traditional Practices for the Natural World – Bal Tashchit:

Wasteful misuse of the world's resources. The prohibition is found in Deuteronomy (20:19-20), "When in your war against a city you have to besiege it for a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy (bal tashchit) its fruit trees... You may eat of them but you must not destroy the fruit trees." Later Jewish thinkers explained that bal tashchit applies to any pointless destruction of resources. We need reconsider and

reapply rabbinic sources which teach that consuming more resources than necessary to achieve a particular human purpose may be bal tashchit. (Eg, Talmud Shabbat 67a, 140a.)

Where We Are: What is Going on in The Jewish Community Now

Tu B'shvat

The Jewish calendar is synchronized with the seasons, and each year on the 15th day of the month of Shevat, just as the almond trees start to bloom in Israel, we celebrate Tu B'shvat, New Year for the trees. Tu B'shvat is celebrated globally by adults and children and marks a dedicated time on the Jewish calendar for celebrating the natural world...

Tu B'shvat has made its mark in schools, synagogues and communities across the world. There are many diverse celebrations which occur in the week surrounding Tu B'shvat ranging from a Green Kiddush, to a Tu B'shvat Seder and tree planting.

Vision for the Next Generation: Jewish Celebration

Tu B'shvat celebration is expanded as a modern Jewish environmental holiday and celebrated as the New Year for trees.

Shinto

Shinto long-term plan

Introduction

This indigenous Japanese faith has approximately 90 million members with 81,000 Shinto shrines throughout the country. These shrines are built largely of wood and form the heart of the villages and local communities of Japan. Often the only extensive areas where trees and greenery flourish in Japanese cities and towns are around holy shrines. Shintos see themselves as protected by creation. It is the forests and not the buildings that mark the true shrines of Shintoism. The deities are invited to these forests, where they and their environment are protected by the local community, which in turn is protected by the deities. The Shinto plan reflects this theology.

The Shinto plan focuses on forestry and comes out of a commitment to pioneer the drawing up of a new Religious Forestry Standard for religiously owned and managed forests by 2013. The plan is for Religious Forests to be managed in ways which are religiously compatible, environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable:

Religiously compatible - based on the faith values, beliefs, heritage and traditions.

Environmentally appropriate - ensures that the harvest of timber and non-timber products, as well as care of sacred areas, maintains the forest's biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes. Also, that those who manage the forest pay attention to environmental concerns, including recycling and non-use of pollutants.

Socially beneficial - helps both local people and society at large to enjoy long-term benefits and also provides strong incentives to local people to sustain the forest resources and adhere to long-term management plans.

Economically viable - means that forest operations are structured and managed so as to be sufficiently profitable, without generating financial profit at the expense of the forest resources, the ecosystem or affected communities. The tension between the need to generate adequate financial returns and the principles of responsible forest operations can be reduced through efforts to market forest products for their best value.

A meeting held in Visby, Gotland in Sweden, in August 2007 and attended by leading representatives of eight different faith traditions with major forestry assets and by leading forestry specialists from the United Nations, World Bank, WWF, Conservation International and various other secular agencies such as FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) agreed on the need to create Religious Forestry Standards (RFS). A key task set for each forest-owning faith was to draw up their own theology of land and forestry.

Timetable of action to achieve this between 2010 and 2014

a. Between Windsor in November 2009 and Ise in May 2014 when the programme ends, a series of RFSs will be developed which are rooted in the specific theologies of each major tradition but which agree on certain key environmental, social and economic frameworks for the protection of forests, of whatever kind, over which faiths have some degree of control.

To reach that goal, an Executive Group will meet every six months over the next four and a half years to ensure that this target is met and to manage the overall programme.

b. The first meeting of the Executive Group will be at Windsor in November 2009. The next meeting will be in Japan in the spring of 2010. In the autumn of 2010, there will be a meeting of theologians who have developed the Theologies of Land and Forests. This will be held in China at the sacred mountain of Hua Shan, near Xian. From this meeting, the core theological framework of each RFS will be agreed and finalised.

c. In spring 2011, an Asian RFS meeting will be held in Cambodia, hosted by the Association of Buddhists for the Environment in Cambodia, with involvement from Jinja Honcho, International Buddhists groups and Cambodian Buddhists. In spring 2012, a meeting of African RFSs will be held, to be followed by a meeting of the European and

North American RFS in autumn 2012.

In 2014, the Executive Group will meet in Japan for the Ise Event where an agreed International Religious Forestry Standard will be launched at the most sacred event in Japanese religious and social life: the rebuilding of the Grand Shrines at Ise. The Jinja Honcho will host all the major forest owning religions at the grand ceremony for the rebuilding of the Great Shrines of Ise.

The Ise Grand Shrines are unique because, in addition to some 5,500 hectares of sacred forest, they are also surrounded by a vast area of forest covering the nearby mountains. These were created to meet the needs of the shrines for timber – with most shrines being replaced every 20-25 years – and a farm to provide food to feed staff and provide offerings to the *kami*.

Together, they comprise a total ecosystem, linking the forests with the river-system, all the way to the sea. It therefore represents the most explicit and advanced example of the Shinto approach to Nature in general, and forest management in particular.

EcoSikh

Individuals/Families: • Plant an EcoSikh garden or tree

Gurdwaras/Organizations: • Distribute tree saplings

A celebration of Basant will also provide a powerful way for us to recognize the beauty of renewal and regeneration. A number of shabads extol the relationship between Sikhism and the environment and we can focus on their message during Basant. Thus, we propose to coordinate an annual EcoSikh holiday season corresponding with Basant...

... Two of these days can be organized around two important events in Guru Har Rai Ji's life, which occur during Basant. The first is Guru Har Rai Ji's Jayanti, February 16. In honor of this day, we propose that all communities participate in a tree planting ceremony.