

G20 INTERFAITH SUMMIT AFRICA REGIONAL CONSULTATION ON ENVIRONMENT: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND

Africa is rich in natural resources ranging from arable land, water, oil, natural gas, minerals, forest reserve, wildlife, human and natural resources. The continent holds a huge proportion of the world's natural resources, both renewables and non-renewables. For example, Africa is home to 30 per cent of the world's mineral reserves, 40 per cent of the world's gold and up to 90 per cent of its chromium and platinum. Africa holds 65 per cent of the world's arable land. Over centuries, the world have benefitted in one way or the other from the natural wealth in Africa. Africa served and is still serving nations of the world.

Unfortunately, conflicts, socio-economic inequalities, and most importantly environmental issues such as climate change predicted to impact more on this continent due to its numerous vulnerabilities plaguing the continent. In Africa, religious beliefs are main drivers for cultural values, social inclusion, political engagement, and economic prosperity. And almost all religions agree that the sanctity of nature is an act of divinity and should be treated as such. Therefore, In sub-Saharan Africa, religious communities have increasingly started to raise awareness, mobilize faith inspired action, provide organizational support, and advocate for policies that fulfil and expand government commitments to protect rainforests and the rights of indigenous peoples; which is providing the needed socio-economic and environmental support; however, these activities are often uncoordinated, fragmented and competing. This is the major gap that requires world leader's attention to ensure sustainable development of the continent.

THE CHALLENGE

The environmental crisis facing the African continent is increasingly seen as a crisis of values and, religion. Therefore, integrating spiritual values into countries' recovery plans, to rebuild back better their economies after COVID-19, can shape the 21st century economy in ways that are clean, green, healthy, ethical and more resilient. The current crisis is an opportunity for a profound, systemic shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet.

Over 70 per cent of people living in sub-Saharan Africa depend on forests and woodlands for their livelihoods. A significant share of these resources is, however, used unsustainably while others are lost through illegal activities. Africa loses an estimated \$195 billion USD annually of its natural capital through illicit financial flows, illegal mining, illegal logging, illegal trade in wildlife, unregulated fishing, environmental degradation among others. Some of the key environmental issues worthy of consideration are:

Land degradation: Africa is the second largest continent in the world with a landmass of 30 million square kilometers. In 2013, the annual contribution of livestock to the economy was \$65 billion USD. However, 500,000 square kilometers of land in Africa is being degraded every year due to soil erosion, bush burning, salinization, building, industrialization, road networks, pollution, chemical fertilizers, pesticides/herbicides, drought, earthquake, desert encroachment, over boring of the earth surface in search for water, deforestation, and other Natural disasters.

Climate change and energy crisis: Most of the continent has been classified as hot spot due to both underlying environmental and socioeconomic issues. This Climate change is already inducing conflicts, migration, freshwater scarcity, loss of biodiversity, energy poverty and dwindling agriculture. This has resulted in over 86% of the population rely on solid fuels for cooking, heating and lighting; using wood as domestic energy, which in turn is depleting the forest reserve. This effect amounts to a large number of deaths recorded each year from hot weather.

Air quality: Indoor and outdoor air pollution poses a major problem for both the environment and human health. About 90 per cent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa are exposed to indoor air pollution. The key drivers of poor air quality in Africa are urbanization, industrialization and fumes/combustion from automobiles, war (use of chemical and biological weapons), ethnic and religious crisis, etc. Poor air quality affects human health, with an estimated 600,000 deaths per year in Africa.

Illegal trade in wildlife: The illegal trade in wild flora and fauna poses serious economic and security risks for Africa which is estimated to be worth up to 150 billion USD per year. Local demand for wildlife products is equally high, and the illegal local harvesting of biological resources may actually be higher than the global organized crime. A considerable proportion of species of all kinds are now rated threatened or endangered by the international union for the conservation of nature (IUCN), and some are now extinct

Biodiversity/Epidemics: Given the rapidly growing human populations in most of African countries, the interactions between human and wildlife species is also on the increase. This affects the symbiotic lifestyle between man and wildlife and there are also the likely implications for transmission of zoonoses back and forth between humans and wildlife, such as Ebola, Lassa fever and **Corona viruses. etc.**

Freshwater, marine and coastal resources: Africa's expanding economies are resulting in greater demand for freshwater, but its quantity and quality are decreasing as a result of over-exploitation, climate change and pollution. More than half of the population in sub-Saharan Africa still do not have access to portable drinking water and improved sanitation, compared to 90 per cent coverage in North Africa. Land based activities are polluting freshwater bodies and causing degradation especially that there are 320 coastal cities in Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address the above highlighted challenges, the followings are recommendations to the G20:

- a) Promote the participation of African Faith Based Organisations (FBO) in international dialogue on global environmental issues.
- b) Establish a Fund that will enable FBOs in Africa to sensitise and train religious leaders and their congregations on environmental protection and climate change in Africa.
- c) Request the establishment of a Faith for Earth Africa Chapter and adoption of strategy for interfaith collaboration for the environment.
- d) Request the empowerment of youth and women, representing more than 70 to 80% of the population in Africa as drivers of change, and the leaders of today and tomorrow.
- e) Establish resource mobilization drives to take action on environmental issues from global and regional faith-based solutions to environmental challenges.
- f) Recommend to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and Ministries of education to introduce Climate Change education, Environment Club and

renewable energy as disciplines in the Education Systems, from early stages of education to Institutions of Higher Learning.

- g) Recommend policy frameworks by the G20 to recognise indigenous peoples and empower them in establishing and managing biodiversity and ecosystem restoration in their territories and for their livelihoods and resources.
- h) Facilitate the establishment of a regional African hub for the Green Climate Fund; and strengthen the implementation of African Union 2063 Agenda, by providing capacity building support and financing from the G20 to be able to deliver on its aspirations.
- i) Establish an African independent body (African Working Group on Environmental Conservation) as a major regional step towards monitoring the commitments of various African states in focusing on Climate Change within the structure of the African Union.
- j) Recommend the inclusion of interfaith voice, demonstrated via the introduction of Interfaith Roundtables in the Global and Regional Heads of States Assemblies; as a Policy, effected through a UN declaration and ratification by the various Member States, or via any other viable means. This could ensure that the vital voices of the Faith sector are captured at the highest level of decision making.
- k) Recommend reviews to the selection criteria for accessing the GCF for local projects by Countries under the Paris Agreement to make it more accessible for Countries that have not previously had the capacity to win grants. Secondly, they could also amend the criteria to allow NGOs and Faith-led Institutions to equally qualify for the awards.
- l) Adopt and enforce legislations against all that constitutes hazard to the environment affecting both man and nature; and implement policies to halt illegal wildlife trade, poaching, land, marine and ecosystem degradation.
- m) Adopt by the African Union and national governments practical strategies to engage faith actors in conservation as an important implementation arm for the SDGs and the 2063 African Agenda.

ROLES OF FBOs

Acknowledging that, dozens of faith-based organizations are already providing the needed socio-economic and environmental support; and commending the current practices of connecting faith and conservation in Africa; these organizations need to focus on some distinct strategic approaches including:

- a. Strengthen education and awareness of the linkages between religious values and environmental stewardship knowing that around 65% of educational institutions are owned by religious institutions.
- b. Provide sustainable and nature-based solutions to socio-economic challenges, through their aid work, , such as cooking stoves, etc.
- c. Enhance interfaith collaboration to fight illegal trade in wildlife as God's creations.
- d. Establish Religious botanical gardens to protect biodiversity and contribute to sustainable biodiversity economy.
- e. Facilitate the creation of networks to promote ecosystem stewardship that improves livelihoods, boosts economic growth and maintains environmental sustainability.
- f. Ensure that institutions owned by religious institutions adopt green buildings standards including switching to renewable energy in the planning, construction and running of these institutions.
- g. Facilitate setting up and running local nature reserves to control farming, grazing of domestic animals, hunting, tree cutting or other destructive practices.

- h. Establish national and continental project for tree planting, organic farming, environmental cleaning, and sustainable waste management.

CONCLUSION

Faith actors in Africa and around the world have been providing important socio-economic support at global, regional and national levels. Environmental stewardship, however, has not taken the center stage in ensuring the sustainability of the continent and there is a major role for the faith actors to play. While, faith leaders and faith communities are ready for a systemic and transformational change, they require support, capacity building and empowerment not only through the much-needed financial assistance, but through the adoption of the requires institutional mechanisms, regulations and policies to strengthen their role in environmental sustainability.

Our commitments are strong and our aspirations are high. The recommendations we are providing are all possible and can be implemented through our commitment to intra and inter-faith collaboration and national and global support through mechanisms provided by the G20.

THANK YOU.