

# AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET

## THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ZIMBABWE

Long-term plan on the environment – summary

### INTRODUCTION

The United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ) was established by missionaries from America in 1893. Now it is a local Church with more than 100 places of worship countrywide and an estimated membership of around 300,000 members. Women make up two thirds of its membership. Many are members of the Church's Women's Union (Ruwadzano). There is also an active Christian Youth Fellowship, Men's Fellowship and volunteers.

The UCCZ has 20 institutions of learning, from primary to high schools, and two tertiary colleges – one of which is an agriculture college. It has four health delivery services with hospitals and clinic services. The Church has been involved in agriculture since the early 1900s, with communities benefiting from the development of underground water supplies and income-generating projects.

Land reform has caused extensive deforestation with the cutting down of trees and burning to clear land for farming. Severe flooding in the last decade has also increased environmental degradation. As a result, tree planting will be a major focus of the Church's long-term plan.

It proposes buying one million trees from the Government's Forest Commission in order to ensure:

- 10,000 trees are planted at 100 church sites;
- Three mission farms plant 800,000 trees;
- 20 church education institutions plant 3,000 trees;
- Four health delivery centres plant 400 trees;
- 100,000 members of the UCCZ plant five trees each, totalling half a million trees.

Kraal heads, headmen chiefs, councilors and school heads will be mobilised to ensure delivery of these targets. Kraal heads and headmen will also be charged with protecting natural resources in especially designated places for rituals or where trees or herbs are grown for medicines.

Communities will be obligated to report the killing of wild animals and endangered animals to this local leadership who will be given authority to impose fines.

Workshops will be organised by the UCCZ to educate local communities and their leaders about the impact of tree cutting and cultivation along riverbanks. These workshops, which will also demonstrate tree planting, will be held in co-operation with Zimbabwe's Forest Commission and the Government's Environmental Management department.

Plans are to hold three larger workshops in the three Conferences of the Church to train women and local leaders on care of the environment. Local leaders and women's groups are key to implementing this long-term plan.

Women have a Council of their own called Ruwadzano. They meet every year in large numbers and have already participated in environmental issues – including forming pressure groups to protect springs and stop riverbank cultivation, growing flowers and fruit trees at home and participating in National Tree planting events.

A Pastors' and Women's Climate Change workshop was held in 2010 which brought together more than 100 women to discuss climate change and how to initiate environmental activities to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

ARC sponsored a workshop in 2011 on the environment and climate change for 177 women from the three Conferences/provinces of the Church. The workshop offered practical training in tree planting and care and species selection and demonstrated the benefits of agroforestry. In addition, a further two-week 'training of trainers' course was sponsored for 25 women focusing on tree planting and species selection as well as understanding rainfall pattern and its impact on food production and climate change adaptation measures.

*Now the Church plans to:*

- Train 25 women in tree nursery planting per church;
- Train 10 young people per church in environmental management and control;
- Establish tree nurseries on all church sites, hospitals and schools;
- Organise annual field days to launch tree planting initiatives;
- Translate the Regional Climate Change Programme Toolkit into local languages. This toolkit has been used by women at the training workshops.
- Incorporate environmental management and climate change issues into every church event;
- Establish environmental committees in the Church to monitor and control tree cutting;
- Establish a fruit tree nursery to supply church projects and establish 20 hectares of land per ward as a reservoir of firewood.

*The long-term plan has been endorsed by Bishop Edward Matuvhunye, President of the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe*

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