



CYNESA
CATHOLIC YOUTH NETWORK FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
IN AFRICA

Réseau de Jeunes catholiques pour un environnement durable en Afrique

Catholic Youth Response to Environmental Concerns in Africa

Young people today long for a way to make a difference in the world. They live at a critical time in the history of the world. The impacts of climate change are real and are taking their toll on the earth and its people. Youth worry about their future in a world where rain forests and oceans, clean water and air are threatened, and where rising temperatures create bigger storms and longer droughts.

The Catholic Church has always been a voice of hope in trying times. The Church's social teaching sheds light on a situation like climate change through Scripture, Catholic social teaching and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Catholic youth can be empowered to draw on our tradition and the Spirit to confront the threat of climate change with creativity, reflection, learning and action. When faith, knowledge, morality and compassion meet an issue...things begin to happen!

Inspired by Saint John Paul II's 1990 message for World Day of Peace, in which he called for the need to upscale ecological awareness and to find fitting expression in concrete programmes and initiatives, young Catholics from East and Southern Africa, drawn from and representing university chaplaincies and parish groups, joined up to respond to this invitation, and to set up the Africa-wide *Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa* (CYNESA) in January 2012.

*"If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."
-Pope Benedict XVI*

CYNESA's

mission is to help young Catholics in sub-Saharan Africa – their movements and communities, individually and with their colleagues – to respond to the twin challenges of environmental degradation and climate change in an **effective, coordinated** and **evangelical** manner, **culturally sensitive** and **spiritually grounded**. Its mission is to link young Catholics together with colleagues in mutual **encouragement** and **support**.

1. Effective : CYNESA aims to create core teams of young Catholic leaders in each country, appreciating what Catholic youth are doing and making these efforts known, strengthening initiatives already underway, and helping potential programmes to get off the ground.

*"For the mystery of the Incarnation of God is the salvation of the whole
of Creation."*

~ St. Ambrose (about 339-397AD)

2. Coordinated in mutual **encouragement** and **support**, working not individualistically but as a body, taking advantage of social media to communicate and give shape to this initiative. As in any network, communications is CYNESA's nervous system and its blood supply too. With Catholic youth scattered throughout sub-Saharan Africa, communications are vital capillary and nervous systems which help bind us into one body. CYNESA **encourages** those involved and **links** them together step-by-step in an active continental network with its own voice and capacity to act and advocate in coordination.

3. Evangelical: As God's children, we have a special responsibility toward each other and the rest of Creation. Nature is our sister. As responsible stewards and co-workers with Christ, we are part of Creation, not separate from it. We must demonstrate the meaning of Christ's life, death, and resurrection in our treatment of Creation. We are to begin the process of properly conserving, developing, and restoring Creation, a process that will be completed by God - the Creator (Father), Redeemer (Son), and Sanctifier (Holy Spirit) of the whole Universe.

4. Culturally sensitive: Globalized culture is obviously imposing itself on Africa with irresistible force, manifesting itself through consumerism and individualism. African indigenous knowledge on the environment has guided communities over many generations in making environmentally sound choices. This knowledge needs to be integrated in current responses, and must not be allowed to erode in the face of globalization. CYNESA aims to make its contribution by engineering its responses in a way which is **sensitive to local culture, faith and spirituality**, and which **works side by side** with other agencies in the field, especially within the Church.

5. Spiritually grounded: An ongoing formation of moral conscience and discernment for making difficult choices according to Gospel and Church teaching, is a main pillar in CYNESA's approach to the environmental crisis. Our relationship with Christ is fundamental in walking the path of social responsibility and responsibility for creation. Such fidelity is the "*guarantee of freedom* (cf. Jn 8:32) and of *the possibility of integral human development*."

"Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone.... Its various aspects demonstrate the need for concerted efforts aimed at establishing duties and obligations that belong to individuals, peoples, states, and the international community." -- Saint John Paul II

What We Do

The environmental crisis does indeed pose a huge threat to the survival of the entire continent of Africa and cannot be underestimated. But even more, this highly complex phenomenon cries out for urgent action at many levels and in many ways. If our initiatives are to be both effective and truly Catholic, they need to take deep roots in the reality of those who suffer.

CYNESA's efforts begin in **our prayer** for all those concerned, and for the authenticity and generosity of our particular contribution. But after that it has to take shape on the ground, in the lives of countless thousands of fellow African citizens. That means working in parishes, schools, with youth movements at various levels and creating fruitful partnerships with other agencies.

CYNESA has already identified more than 50 young Catholic leaders, drawn from parishes, university chaplaincies and Catholic youth movements representing 8 African countries, with a growing list of expressions of interest being received from more Catholic youth.

“Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded” – Pope Francis (Laudato Si:13)

Our activities are tailored into three main areas:

- Formation and awareness creation – We are preparing a toolkit on climate change that draws from scripture and Catholic social teaching. We also organize forums to create awareness on the Sustainable Development Goals, biodiversity, waste management among other issues.
- Networking and advocacy training – We seek to establish and build relationships with like-minded partners, and to train young Catholics in advocacy on environmental sustainability, and to link different initiatives on the continent. CYNESA is accredited to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).
- Encouraging and supporting concrete action plans at the local level – We endeavor to encourage young people to act in their parishes, schools and within their youth movements by developing appropriate sustainable practices to conserve resources.

How CYNESA’s Core Team works

The CYNESA Core team plays a coordinating role for the entire network and its members work from multiple locations, to grow and develop the network’s profile and identify resources to make this possible. The principal ways in which the CYNESA core team nourishes the network are:

- **Visiting** Catholic youth and their projects in each country, **appreciating** what they are doing and making these efforts known, **strengthening** initiatives already underway, and **helping potential** projects get off the ground
- **Encouraging** those involved and **linking** them together in an active continental network.
- **Communicating** and **publishing**
 - *CYNESANews*: <info@cynesa.org>
 - Website: www.cynesa.org
 - **Publishing books** – CYNESA’s long-term objective is to build capacity to publish books in Africa in English, French and Portuguese
- **Representing** CYNESA and **participating** in national, regional and international environmental meetings.
- **Undertaking research** – CYNESA aims to set up a documentation centre, to facilitate young researchers.
- **Offering guidance and support** for environmental related projects
- **Maintaining good relations** of co-operation with others working on environmental issues, with the larger Church and other youth movements world-wide

In 2018-2019, CYNESA will continue to **encourage new initiatives** in the environmental field to get established, as well as reach more young people, by setting up new CYNESA chapters in Africa.

Thank you for your interest, support and prayers! *Laudato Si'!*

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