**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE GAMBIA**

**NATIONAL CHURCH YOUTHS DESK**

**THE CHURCH AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE GAMBIA**

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There is a clear link between man’s behaviour, his religious belief, and the environment. Religion influences a person’s attitude and/or behavior towards the environment. Religion is a powerful vehicle in the enhancement of positive environmental behavior in man.

The impact of religion on society through literacy and education is particularly noteworthy. Many religious institutions have records of being good environmental conservations. You have actually been addressing environmental issues for several years, in school, and in your areas of worship. Yet the task ahead of us is enormous. There is also a need for the Church and other religions organizations to redouble efforts in this area. I do not want to sound apocalyptic, but the environment is at the core of human survival.

The government has high expectations from the work of the Church in supporting environmental management and conservation and conservation efforts. We recognize the power of the church institutions around the world in transforming our society particularly the mindset. We hope that you will continue with your mission to ensure that our environment is preserved. We also know that you have the potential and actual means at your disposal for carrying out this risk. In carrying out the task, we would like to pose the following challenges:

* Use of the gospel and theological teaching in education and awareness creation
* Use of Church-based information infrastructure including TV, Radio, Newspapers, and the internet to preach environment management and protection
* Launching an ELCTG Environmental education Program to focus on children, the youth and the community.
* Incorporating environmental curricula in schools, seminaries and colleges;
* Enhancing and fostering collaboration with and among Non-governmental Organizations NGOs) Community Based Organization (CBO’s) that work in the area of environmental protection and conservation.
* Introducing the environment as an agenda for discussion at church gatherings/meetings;
* Initiation of poverty eradication projects in view of the poverty and environment
* Provision of support to disadvantaged groups such as refugees, the needy and landless people.
* Making church centres environmentally friendly places, and as examples from which congregations can learn. Lutheran churches must have a long term horizon. They should acquire large track of land for multipurpose use, and not mere plots to build churches.

Sustainable development is the key to meeting the myriad of environmental challenges we face, including climate change. Succinctly defined in Our Common Future, the Brundtland Report on the World and the Environment, the concept of sustainable development has been incorporated in our National Strategy for Growth and reduction of Poverty as “*a commitment to ensuring that future generations, emphasizing sustainable use of the country’s natural resources and avoiding harmful effects on the environment and on people’s livelihoods*.”

The Gambia has developed and implemented various policies and strategic to promote sustainable development. In this regard, major milestone in the country, since the World Summit on Environment in Rio de Janeiro, include: the 1994 National Environment Action Plan (NEAP), prepared to carry out a national analysis and provide a framework to incorporate environmental consideration into government decision-making processes; the 1997 National Environmental Policy (NEP), formulated to define national goals and strategic objectives in environment; the National Action Programme (NAP) to Compact Desertification prepared in 1999 under auspices of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification for Environmental Management Project in countries affected of which Gambia is one. (ILFEMP).

In 2000, a Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources and Environment was formed to enhance awareness of policy makers on the importance of environment and its integration in the overall development framework at national level. Several other key macro and sectoral policies have been reviewed and adopted to reflect increased accent towards environmental quality objectives. These include: the Mineral Sector Policy; Wildlife Policy; Fisheries Policy; Forestry Policy; Water Policy, Agricultural Policy, energy Policy, and the National Land Policy.

The Gambia has put in place has also put in place a number of legislative measures to promote effective environmental management. More recently, a National Environmental Management Act EMA, 2024) became operation in 2025, as framework environmental legislation to provide coherent environmental management including sustainable land and water management. A number of other laws and legislations have also been enacted and/or reviewed that have incorporated sustainable environmental management practices.

Despite all these efforts by the state, governments needs support from local and international organisations to play leading roles in various ways. This is the point and stand of the Evangelical Lutheran church of The Gambia in the processes of the proclamation of the Gospel.

The youth’s department supported by the national church leadership and Cevaa International SDG seminar in Benin in 2024, through youth’s seminars on the Environment, the national church youths has been trained to protect their environment in their communities.

**Seminar topics**

Combating the Degradation of Land and Water Catchment Areas, which I alluded to the fact that land, Water, and air broadly define the environment and are the essence of our existence. While the foregoing policies, legislation and resulting regulations have worked, to some extent, to address the problem, the degradation of land and water Catchment areas has continued unabated. Over 60% of the land area of The Gambia is facing the threat of serious desertification. Unsustainable livestock keeping/pastoralism and agricultural activities, among other factors, have exacerbated land degradation and the degradation of water Catchment areas and the erosion of the otherwise rich biodiversity of The Gambia. It is from this context that the government has decided to launch a unique, country driven, National Strategy on Urgent Actions to combat the degradation of Land and Water Catchment in The Gambia. What is our role as a church in this area? We are part of the state and the people; we need to boast government’s efforts and plans

The Strategy identifies specific challenges on land and water Catchment degradation in the country. It identifies areas affected, measures/strategic actions required to address the challenge, the timeframe for the actions and responsible institutions.

The strategy seeks to address the following challenges:

* **Environmental degradation arising from the encroachment of water source and Catchment areas by livestock keepers/ herdsmen**

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| **Strategic**  **actions** | * + Identification and mapping of all water source countrywide,   + Identification of stressed water Catchment areas encroached by large numbers of livestock,   + Identification of areas suitable for livestock development to which such livestock can be relocated,   + Collection of information regarding the type of livestock, quantities/numbers, and carrying capacities of the land,   + Drawing an implementation plan to relocate and resettle livestock keepers,   + Identification, popularization, and use of traditional methods and indigenous knowledge for environmental protection.   + Ban of unauthorized movement of livestock,   + Identification, supervision, monitoring and management of permitted livestock transfer routes,   + Construction of Chaco’s, and provision of alternative water sources for herdsmen,   + Creation of awareness on livestock carrying capacities and maintenance and use of water infrastructure |

* **Environmental degradation arising from illegal human activities related to agriculture and human settlement along steep slopes of mountains and mountain ranges, near riverbanks and around water sources**

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| **Strategic**  **actions** | * + Identification of encroached and severely degraded areas,   + Removal of illegal occupiers of areas concerned,   + Determination of boundary of mountain ranges above which no human activities will be allowed,   + Popularization of rain water harvesting technologies and implementation of programs and projects associated with rainwater harvesting. |

* **Environmental degradation due to deforestation and massive tree cutting for: Fuel Wood and charcoal and constructions in urban areas (excessive use of wood poles, timber, etc.)**

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| **Strategic**  **actions** | * + Require institutions such as prisons, schools and training institutions that use massive amounts of wood, to have wood plantations,   + Establish nurseries for appropriate tree species,   + Sensitive villages and urban centers to establish forest farms for firewood and charcoal,   + Encourage research, development, and application of alternative energy source and appropriate technologies,   + Promote the use of Kerosene, gas and coal as alternatives to wood fuel. |

* **Unsustainable small and large scale irrigation projects and programs, with negative consequences on biodiversity and general water availability**

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| **Strategic actions** | * Implementation of regulations and procedures related to water rights, * Maintenance of irrigation infrastructure and regular inspecting of the said, * Maintenance of irrigation canals such that excess water returns to the main water sources, |

* **Inadequate data and information at district level regarding water sources and land use**

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| **Strategic actions** | * + Identification of all water sources and assessment of their environmental status,   + Development, dissemination and implementation of land use master plan, and   + Giving title deeds to water source areas for proper protection. |

* **Environmental degradation due to wild fires**

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| **Strategic actions** | * + To award individuals or organizations that provide information on forest or rangeland fires   + To empower local leadership in the prevention and control of such fires in their areas of jurisdiction,   + To create a data/information on incidences of wild fires. |

* **Land and water degradation resulting from alien and exotic tree species**

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| **Strategic actions** | * + Identification of such unsuitable tree species   + Development of a community participatory programme for the removal of such species,   + Identification and promotion of tree species suitable for the protection and conservation of land and water sources, countrywide. |

* **Desertification and drought in many parts of the country**

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| **Strategic actions** | * + Preparation for further guidelines for continued implementation of a National tree Planting and Maintenance Campaign,   + Sensitization of the public on the Tree Planting and Maintenance Campaign,   + Establishment of tree nurseries, with each district required to plant and maintain 1.5 million trees per year   + Preparation and getting of list of types of protection indigenous flora) Trees and other plant species). |

* + **Public awareness and involvement in environmental protection and sustainable utilization of natural resources**

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| **Strategic actions** | * + Preparation and implementation of a countrywide Environment Educational and Public Awareness Program   + Monitoring and evaluation of the program |

* + **Land use conflicts among various stakeholders**

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| **Strategic actions** | * + Preparation of environmental conservation and participatory land use plans for every district   + Determination of livestock carrying capacities and participatory land use plans for every district,   + Surveying and mapping 6000 villages   + Mainstreaming the environmental Management Act 2004 into sector environmental laws and to oversee their implementation |

* + **Environmental degradation arising from mining activities.**

Fromthe aforementioned challenges, which is the most pressing, most formidable? Response has always been ‘that of creation of the environment’. To paraphrase the permeable to the charter of United nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ‘since environmental destruction starts from the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of the environment must be created’. Focusing on educating the society and in particular the youth in our circumstances can have an impact on the attainment of objectives of any environmental management and protection strategy.

State Committees on Environment, comprising of all key sectors (Vice President’s Office, Ministries of Lands, Housing and human Settlement; Forestry and Natural Resources Empowerment; Water; Livestock; Local Government; and Community Development) has been formed to provide general oversight and guidance over environmental protection. It also monitors the progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

**Our source of teaching is from our national church research findings on topics on the environment for youths to learn to care for their environment.**