



Center for Earth Ethics

City: Mombasa, Kenya

Date: Tuesday, 26 July 2022

Time: 8am ET / 3pm EAT

Registration: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_TDXSMbL7SziKbkgWjezVjA

Introduction

On 21 February 2022, UNEP Faith for Earth, UN-Habitat, the World Evangelical Alliance and the Ormond Centre hosted a Dialogue session '[Faith Communities Enabling Inclusive and Equitable Cities](#)' to strengthen a faith-based engagement towards Sustainable Cities (SDG11).

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) identifies urban ecosystems as “radical transformations of natural areas” to serve a quality of life that modern society have come to expect and rely on.

The [UN Decade](#) calls for greater commitments from civic groups and municipal authorities to set ambitious and innovative targets and fast-track sustainable urban ecosystems.

As such, UNEP Faith for Earth launched the [A Strategy for Engagement: The Role of Faith Leaders and Faith-Based Organisations in the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration \(2021-2030\)](#) identifying 3 key actions to spur action for ecosystems globally by faith actors: Build Capacity on Global Knowledge and Scientific Evidence; Strengthen Partnerships with Faith Leaders for Policy Impact; and Actively Engage

This Consultation will focus on sharing knowledge with local social and faith leaders in Mombasa, Kenya, predominantly of the Muslim, Hindu and Christian religious traditions by highlighting a duty of care for the environment, particularly in the context of urban ecosystems.

Session Outcomes

To highlight Mombasa, Kenya as a case study to uplift the role of faith actors in introducing green spaces and their multiple ecosystem services in cities:

- Imbue the need for nature and biodiversity in cities, as a natural expression of religious and faith traditions;
- Call on faith actors in Mombasa to identify the importance (religious/spiritual/social/health) of developing urban green spaces;
- Demonstrate Consolata Shrine as a good practice to facilitate peer-to-peer learning.

Environmental concerns

While urban settings are considered noisy, polluted and overcrowded concrete jungles, they also house rich religious and cultural heritage – for the individual and the community.

The past decade has witnessed the largest ever migration of people from rural to urban areas for a myriad of reasons, estimated to rise [from 56 per cent in 2021 to 68 per cent in 2050](#) overwhelming city infrastructure, social services, and services by local governments.

The environmental impact of an unsustainable built environment impacts migratory routes, natural wildlife habitats, compromise watersheds and ecosystems. Cities, as they are currently designed and built demonstrate a hierarchy of priorities – undervaluing the importance of healthy and productive areas of land with natural vegetation and rich soil, for stone, glass and concrete to meet short-term economic and developmental gains.

The ecosystem services that green spaces offer are essential. The lack thereof do not aid the facilitation of the nutrient cycle and increase the risk of flooding due to poor rainwater drainage exposing city dwellers to water-borne disease. The lack of sufficient green space attributes to high daytime temperatures and poor air quality due to the density of buildings and prevalence of motor traffic in the city.

Geography

Mombasa is the indigenous home of the Banu-speaking people of East Africa who relied on the farming, fishing, and local trading as a source of livelihood.

In 1331, the Arab traveler [Ibn Battūtah](#) visited the land followed by the Portuguese navigator [Vasco da Gama](#) in 1498.

Mombasa held strategic sea and land access and was colonised by the various invading powers, passing among the Arabs, Persians, Portuguese, and Turks until 1840, when the [sultan of Zanzibar](#) finally gained control. It came under British administration in 1895 and was the capital of the [East Africa](#) Protectorate until 1907. Mombasa became a municipality in 1928 and assumed council status in 1959.

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mombasa>

Mombasas urban situation is influenced by its complex colonial history (land-zoning) shaping the availability of public spaces, particularly urban green spaces. Today, access to green spaces is traced back to racial and socio-political realities The “rapid and altering changes in the landscape”.

This Consultation seeks to uplift these realities to foster a culture of understanding and harmony between communities and ecological goals, altering the perception of nature to a positive one geared towards inspiring action.

Source: Green Histories: The Urban Space of Mombasa, Honours Thesis, Postgraduate Honours in Environmental Geographical Science at the University of Cape Town, Simran Khataw

Socio-economic importance

Faith actors have significantly influenced the way cities are constructed, and how they function.

Cities present the opportunity for formal education, employment and modern lifestyle. They were once established around houses of worship and critical ecological sites and today, multiple religious markers are scattered in every city around the world, ranging from houses of worship, education institutions, charity shops, monuments of remembrance, gardens and parks, cemeteries, and others.

Religious and faith leaders and their institutions are considered as anchors for communities with vital contextual knowledge of local contexts, spiritual, cultural, and economic development.

Cities need to integrated more green spaces to transform the landscape (both physically and intangibly) to reflect sustainability, equity and access to cites of refuge to make them feel more liveable.

Source: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/nature-based-solutions-resilient-cities-and-restoring-local-biodiversity>

Cultural and Spiritual significance

Devotion. Compassion. Spiritual Prosperity. Material Prosperity. Care for the Common Good.

It is upon these principles that faith communities act as social catalysers, being stewards of spiritual and material resources that are vital for mobilizing people for action for the common good.

Their unrivalled local presence with on-the-ground organisations and strong social and spiritual membership with the capacity for binding together those with similar understandings, fostering mutual respect and cohesion. This strong intrafaith role is complemented by their interfaith role, aiding those outside their communities for peace, solidarity, and the common good as advocates for our highest human values.

Links

- UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration: Urban Ecosystems: <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/types-ecosystem-restoration/urban-areas>
- Mombasa: History and Facts: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mombasa#:~:text=It%20came%20under%20British%20administration,Kilindini%20Harbour%20on%20the%20west>
- Faith for Earth Dialogue: Changing the Future - Faith and Cities Session: <https://youtu.be/YfG1cQbqJHs>