



Sustainable development and UK faith groups: Two sides of the same coin?

A survey of UK faith communities'
sustainable development activities
and next steps for the future

A report from
WWF-UK and the SDC

October 2005

About this report:

The Sustainable Development Commission

The Sustainable Development Commission is the Government's independent advisor on sustainable development. Chaired by leading environmentalist, Jonathon Porritt, with Commissioners drawn from academia and the private, public and not for profit sectors, the SDC works across many areas of policy and practice, including energy, transport, climate change, health, education, consumption and economic growth.

The SDC's 'Redefining Prosperity' publication exploded the myth that, above a certain threshold, more money makes us happier, and kick-started the policy debate on alternative measures of well-being. As part of a seminar series, the SDC invited UK faith leaders to explore sustainable development within their faith communities. Although invitations were sent to a good cross-section of different UK faith groups, representation at the seminar was predominately Christian, and many of the activities described in this report are led by Christian faiths. Efforts to promote understanding of sustainable development would benefit greatly from more visibility of the work of a range of faith groups.

The seminar concluded that neither sustainable development nor sustainable consumption were adequately integrated into policy making, and both politicians and faith leaders failed to adequately address these pressing issues. There was a suggestion that senior faith group leaders could make more connections between their spiritual beliefs and the need to preserve the earth. The seminar proposed a report to make clear these connections and highlight the current faith-led activities on these issues. WWF were invited to join SDC in this undertaking.

WWF

WWF is the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisation, working in more than 90 countries with the aid of five million supporters. Its mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's environment, and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

Sustainable development is at the heart of WWF's work and the organisation is widely recognised for its expertise in this area. As an 'apolitical' organisation WWF is in an excellent position to work with faith communities as part of its sustainable communities programme. A partnership with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), a UK-based organisation that works with the world's religions on environmental issues resulted in WWF's Sacred Land project, to develop a model for managing land owned by religious organisations throughout the world.

Estimates suggest that the 11 major faiths involved own around seven per cent of the habitable surface of the planet. WWF has been a long term supporter and advisor to the International Interfaith Investment Group, 3iG, which was established as part of the project. 3iG are developing a large scale, socially responsible investment scheme for religious funds. Members include heavyweights such as the US United Methodist Pension Board, which has already committed \$13 billion to socially responsible investments.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Jonathon Porritt



We hear a lot these days about the business case for sustainable development, but rather less about the equally convincing moral case for sustainable development. That moral case rests on a fundamental commitment both to greater equity and social justice (within and between different generations, and within and between different countries), and on the recognition that we have a moral obligation to secure the well-being of other creatures regardless of whether or not they bring any benefit to humankind. The concept of 'stewardship', of taking responsibility in so far as we can for the whole of life on Earth, is a powerful source of moral inspiration for hundreds of millions of people and an important element in all the world's major religions and faith systems.

In "The Hidden Connections", Fritjof Capra digs a little deeper into these relationships:

"Ultimately, deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness. When the concept of the human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a sense of belonging, of connectedness, to the cosmos as a whole, it become clear that ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest essence.

Interestingly, such views command much less support than might be supposed in the wider green movement in the UK. There is often hostility to those who promote a spiritually inspired perspective on today's sustainable development challenges, the roots of which tell us a lot about some of the barriers that will need to be overcome if we are to fashion a genuinely sustainable future for the whole of humankind.

As this survey so clearly demonstrates, there are many resonances here for advocates of sustainable development. In the past, Max Weber's idea of the Protestant work ethic described the primary drivers for people to use their God-given talents along the lines of 'I work so that I might go to heaven'. For the average rich world citizen today, the consumer work ethic of the late 20th century has replaced the Protestant work ethic with 'I work so that I might buy more.' Whilst this might be in the interest of businesses trying to sell more and more, it will clearly prove to be environmentally and socially unsustainable in the near future. So for sustainable development, what motivates us as individuals is critical.

Take just two of today's most pressing sustainability challenges: how to counter the all-but-universal seduction of consumerism, and the need for people to go beyond rational respect for the natural systems upon which we depend by developing a much more humble, reverential ethos. There are few sources of authority (let alone wisdom) in addressing these two challenges that are not derived from religious or spiritual sources.

My own feeling is that we constantly underestimate this hunger for transcendence, just as we underestimate our extraordinary capacity for the deepest feelings of empathy and compassion for other people and for the living world. Too much is made of the highly visible manifestations of self-interest and apparent indifference; the less visible (and often completely invisible) outpouring of acts of altruism and selflessness are rarely factored into the rather crude generalizations that today's steely-eyed fatalists tend to make about human nature. One has only to take account of the countless millions of people involved in volunteering or charity work of one kind or another to realize how misleading this can be.

For more and more people, the business of nurturing our spiritual capacity is now a serious priority. At the heart of this endeavour is the idea of finding 'a new story', enabling us to reconnect with our evolutionary origins going back over 14 billion years of unfolding life, to understand better our place in creation, and to experience that sense of interconnectedness and interdependence with the rest of life on Earth - the loss of which now imperils our very future.



Chairman, Sustainable Development Commission
October 2005

Executive summary

UK faith groups have much to offer in helping to deliver sustainable development. Rooted in their locality over generations, defined by a strong, shared set of non-materialistic values, and experienced in working together with trust and respect, faith groups are well-placed, both in outlook and practice, to influence and deliver sustainable development at all levels. Prayer and spiritual belief offer a means of support lacking in the secular world.

Sustainable development policymakers and practitioners, with their understanding of the complex links between economic, social and environmental factors and their focus on achieving 'win/win' outcomes, can offer faith groups a new framework within which to tackle local problems, provide practical expertise, and signpost sources of funding.

However, it is often the case that those working on sustainability do not always understand the contribution faiths could make, just as those within faith communities do not see the connections between their values and sustainable development. Policymakers and practitioners may lack a detailed understanding of faiths' beliefs and activities, whilst faith communities may not be familiar with the term 'sustainable development'. A case in point: Agenda 21 called on governments to be committed to 'social, economic and spiritual development', but the latter was widely ignored in the UK by policymakers and faith communities alike.

The following overlap exists between faiths' values and beliefs and the principles of sustainable development:

- Non-materialistic values and ethics
- Interconnectedness and interdependence
- Reverence for life, and stewardship
- Bearing witness and personal responsibility

- Social justice and an ethic of "fair shares".

Faith groups play an important role in the following aspects of sustainable development:

- Education, information and awareness-raising about sustainable development
- Acting responsibly – faith groups as resource managers, employers and purchasers
- Energy and climate change
- Moving towards sustainable consumption
- The global agenda: trade justice and tackling world poverty
- The social and economic agendas
- Promoting people's well-being and health.

Engagement in practice – case studies of current practice

Throughout the report are case studies of both national and local projects. These are presented as examples that show what faith groups can achieve and link in various ways to the issues discussed throughout Section 6. They are by no means unique or 'the best': many of the other cases referred to in the text are equally significant.

The case studies are:

1. Be Fikr: A Muslim project to make Balsall Heath 'warm and cosy'
2. Partners in Creation: Exploring environmental responsibility through Jewish teaching
3. Windhorse Trading: Business the Buddhist Way
4. St Sidwell's Centre: Building on a Christian heritage of community well-being.

Other good examples include:

1. Operation Eden
2. The Muslim Khatri Association Community Centre, Leicester

3. The A Rocha UK Living Waterways project
4. SAGE – Oxford’s Christian Environment Group
5. ‘Greening the Meeting House’ – a project of the Dorking Quaker Meeting
6. ENHANCE: the Black Majority Churches Environmental project pilot study
7. Environments for All in Leicester – working across faiths
8. IFEES – the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences.

Priority areas for action:

These case studies highlight the following

- Making more explicit links between sustainable development and individual and collective faith practices
- Leadership for faiths around sustainable development
- Faith-specific sustainable development projects
- Interfaith activity on sustainable development.

Next steps

Sustainable development policymakers and practitioners

- Sustainable development policy makers and practitioners can make more effort to understand the UK’s major faiths, both in terms of religious beliefs and cultural practices, and creatively explore the contribution they make to sustainable development
- This increased understanding could lead to the development of specific communications materials linking faiths’ tenets to sustainable development principles and practices, and encouraging action
- Funders can better understand potential ethical objections to certain funding sources on the part of faith communities
- Specific sustainable development faith-led projects may be explored.

Faith leaders and faith communities

- Faith leaders can raise the profile of environmental and social issues, framed within the tenets of their faith,

and encourage faith groups to take action. Climate change is arguably the most pressing issue to address, and sustainable consumption is one in which, with values that challenge consumerism, faith groups have a natural ‘head start’

- Faith leaders can implement sustainable development practices in the areas of ‘corporate’ building, land and investment portfolios and procurement
- Local faith communities can follow the examples highlighted in this publication, and begin their own projects
- Successful projects could ‘make more noise’ to celebrate their achievements and encourage others to do the same
- Emerging interfaith relationships can be bolstered by practical action on sustainable development.

This report attempts to show the multiplicity of initiatives taking place across the UK, and points the way forward for other faith groups who share a concern for social justice and environmental issues. The report’s compilers are aware of the predominance of Christian groups amongst the initiatives described in the report, conceived during a seminar based on the SDC report *Redefining Prosperity*. There must be many other sustainable development initiatives taking place across the broad spectrum of faith groups in the UK, but access to mainstream communications networks remains limited for many groups.

Part 1 Background and overview

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is both a journey towards the end point where humankind has learnt to live sustainably on this planet, and a framework within which to achieve an equitable balance between potential economic, environmental and social benefits, between the wealthy and the poor, and between the interests of this generation and those to come.

UK faith groups have much to offer in helping to deliver sustainable development. Rooted in their locality over generations, defined by a strong, shared set of non-materialistic values, and experienced in working together with trust and respect, faith groups are well-placed, both in outlook and practice, to influence and deliver sustainable development at all levels. Prayer and spiritual belief offer a means of support lacking in the secular world.

Sustainable development policymakers and practitioners, with their understanding of the complex links between economic, social and environmental factors and their focus on achieving 'win win' outcomes, can offer faith groups a new framework within which to tackle local problems, provide practical expertise, and signpost sources of funding.

Published jointly by WWF and the SDC, this report highlights UK faith communities' activities across all aspects of sustainable development, through longer case studies and shorter summaries. It outlines priority areas for action, and a series of next steps for faith leaders and communities,

sustainable development policymakers and practitioners, and the WWF and the SDC. All are intended to foster greater understanding and joint action.

2. UK faiths in society

UK faith communities are amongst the leading 'actors' within civil society and this is widely recognised by local and national government.

"Faith groups are an important part of the voluntary and community sector, although they do have distinctive characteristics and potential of their own.. (Local Government Association, 2002)

"Faith-based ventures are adding to the life and well-being of our communities." (Stephen Timms MP for East Ham, 2004)

Faith groups can usefully be seen as communities of interest – people who share common interests or attributes – but at the local level they are also communities of place – people who live in a specific area. More significantly, they may also be communities of identity – those defined by a shared feeling of identity or some strong common bond. This linking of place, interest and identity is often rare, and helps make faith groups important parts of a broader local community. This has been increasingly recognised in regeneration programmes, where they are playing an increasing role and working more closely with local service deliverers:

The 2001 UK census details (Table 1) provides a detailed picture of UK faiths.

Table 1		The major UK faiths	
• Christian			42,079,000
<i>Church of England</i>			
<i>Catholic</i>			
<i>Presbyterian</i>			
<i>Methodist</i>			
<i>Baptist</i>			
<i>Quaker</i>			
<i>Others</i>			
• Muslim			1,591,000
• Hindu			559,000
• Sikh			336,000
• Jewish		267,000	
<i>Orthodox</i>			
<i>Reformed</i>			
• Buddhist			152,000
Other religions including:			179,000
• Ba'hai			
• Jain			
• Zoroastrian			

"To be truly inclusive, local councils must work positively with all faith communities, as we can provide access to the most marginalised in society in a unique and effective manner that more traditional providers are not in a position to achieve." Joe Ahmed-Dobson, Chair of the Muslim Council of Britain's Regeneration and Renewal Committee 2003

3. Faith groups and the sustainable development agenda

"Religion is a particularly strong shaper of the worldviews of many of the world's people, which is why I see the participation of religious groups in advancing sustainable development as such a hopeful sign." (Worldwatch Paper 164 Sept 2004)

In Spring 2005, the Prime Minister launched a new strategy for sustainable development, *Securing the Future*, which, amongst a raft of policy

initiatives and new commitments, set out the actions local groups are encouraged to take to improve life for communities and reduce the environmental impact of everyday life. (See Appendix B www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

Faith communities have many characteristics that make them an essential partner in delivering sustainable development. They are often among the strongest groups in any local area, with a clear sense of shared identity and purpose. As respected and trusted members of the community, they can exert an important influence on the behaviour of others by leading by example, and their continued presence over generations provides local stability and continuity.

In addition, faith communities often own significant holdings of land or buildings at the heart of communities, which can

be managed sustainably and used in a variety of ways for local community services. Religious celebrations and festivals can be important social focal points, and inject diversity and vibrancy into community life.

But given the on-going debate in all sectors about the difficulty of communicating sustainable development, it would not be surprising if faith communities were to ask 'What has sustainable development got to do with what I believe?'. In fact, there is a natural fit between the beliefs and values of religious faiths, and the principles and practices required for sustainability.

There are a number of common issues at the roots of most, if not all, faiths that seem to be very relevant to sustainability:

- Non-materialistic values and ethics
- Interconnectedness and interdependence
- Reverence for life, and stewardship
- Bearing witness and personal responsibility
- Social justice and an ethic of "fair shares"

These common issues are outlined in more detail below.

Non-materialistic values and ethics

"Despair and fear are natural human responses in the face of overwhelming destruction. Nevertheless we can be set free in the Spirit to live our lives in radically different ways that challenge consumer culture. For many this is hard, and can only involve small steps, but even small steps lead to other steps, and to empowerment, overcoming despair. Quaker's 2001 Call to Action

In an increasingly materialistic society that appears to prioritise personal consumption and financial profit, faith groups espouse an alternative set of

values that point to a different definition of what constitutes a good life.

Kindness, compassion, altruism, good intention, personal responsibility, service to others, and spiritual practice are all deemed more intrinsically valuable than material wealth.

Sustainability shares the notion that there is more to life than financial gain, (indeed, pursuit of financial gain often comes at a social and environmental cost), and that the way forward lies in a more co-operative, inclusive, and compassionate approach. Climate change and other sustainability issues have a moral, as well as a scientific, dimension, for example in the question of natural resource distribution. Faith groups are well-placed to contribute their ethical insights. The Ba'hai faith makes this link explicit, stating that "only when personal commitment broadens from family, ethnic and national concerns to a wider loyalty to the whole human race, will it be possible to effectively apply the principles of sustainable development."

Jewish ethics and sustainability

U.S. organic farmer Daron Joffe contends that three Jewish ethics point to environmental stewardship. *Bal tash'hit* states that when an enemy city is besieged, fruit-bearing trees must not be cut down. This injunction may be irrelevant to many in its literal form, but for Joffe, the law translates easily into the modern axioms of conservation: reduce, reuse, and recycle. *Tikkun olam* enjoins Jews to "heal the earth." Finally, Joffe views the ancient practice of Kosher eating as a mandate for supporting "modern issues of sustainability, labor rights, and agricultural integrity."

Interconnectedness and interdependence

"We are destined to share this planet together and as the world grows smaller, we need each other more than in the past. But, whether we are trying to reduce the nuclear threat, defend human rights or preserve the natural environment, it is difficult to achieve a spirit of genuine co-operation as long as people remain indifferent to the feelings and happiness of others. What is required is a kind heart and a sense of community, which I call universal responsibility." His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in an address to 'Seeking the True Meaning of Peace', San Jose, Costa Rica. June 25-30-1989.

Faith communities extend around the world in a unified network of followers, and many faiths recognise that we live in an increasingly interconnected, and interdependent, world. The Christian John Ray Initiative stresses this, as does the Quaker 2001 'Call to Action' and the Ba'hai 'call for justice'. Interdependence is also a central principle in Buddhist thought.

The science of ecology, from which the concept of sustainability arises, demonstrates the interconnection and interdependence of all living things in an ecosystem, and as part of the planet's ecosystem, humans are therefore connected to and dependent on the natural world we live in. Our behaviour has good and bad, intended and unintended consequences on nature's life support systems, and those consequences in turn will impact on our own species' ability to survive and thrive.

The Biblical creation stories give human beings privilege and responsibility in relation to the earth and every living creature. We are called to be partners with the rest of creation and co-partners in the ongoing creative and renewing activity of God. Such partnership goes

wrong when human beings act as if the whole earth were simply for their present benefit. God's way, revealed in the Bible and particularly in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, is a generous sharing of the divine love to serve the needs of God's creation until it reaches its fulfilment.

From the Environment Policy Document of the Diocese of Manchester

Reverence for life, and stewardship

"It is He who has appointed you viceroys of the earth." (Qur'ân - 6:165)

Reverence for life is central to almost all religious writings and is expressed in many different ways. The Quakers believe that "we do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation." (Advices and Queries, 1994, No.42). The Buddhist tradition is to value all life, sentient and non-sentient.

The Qur'an and sustainable development

Muslim scholar Saadia Khawar Khan Chishti links passages in the Qur'an to sustainable development. She quotes Mohammad, the prophet of Islam, as saying "the whole of the Earth is a mosque that is a place of worship." According to Chishti, the fastidious care of the mosque can therefore reasonably be understood to include the natural world.

From reverence for life comes the view of the created world as a precious gift for which faith followers should give thanks. And as befits a precious gift, creation care and stewardship, the responsible use and safeguarding of natural resources, is an appropriate course of action. The John Ray Initiative suggests that stewardship means recognising that the "earth is the Lord's, entrusted by God to us, and that we shall have to give account for our use of the earth's resources and our relationship with the whole of His creation."

Halting and healing unsustainable damage to the natural world are therefore appropriate actions for faith communities to undertake. In sustainable development terms, this equates to the principle of ensuring that future generations are not negatively affected by today's decisions and actions.

Bearing witness and personal responsibility

The concept of bearing witness is central to many faiths, requiring believers to witness, then speak, the truth of their experiences, however difficult. At a time when people are becoming increasingly aware of social and environmental problems but feel powerless to act, bearing witness is one way in which to take action. And religious faith can offer powerful support in the face of fear and denial. In a secular context, bearing witness was adopted by Greenpeace as a key approach to its work in the 1990s. And with witnessing comes a sense of personal responsibility. Recognising, valuing and responding to personal responsibility is a key starting point for sustainable development.

"The Hiroshima Witness was such hard work to help organise. On the actual night, it was moving and beautiful. It was made even more special by the things which weren't planned, like the man who gave out flower petals for people to throw in the lake because that's what they do in India and the singing of "Shalom" just made it more diverse and striking.

I was amazed that it had actually worked. We made over 850 boats with candles in them and it had been windy all day so I was really worried that all the candles would blow out and the boats would sink and it would all be terrible...but just as the witness was starting, the wind dropped and stayed calmer until the witness had finished and then it picked up again and although I do not believe in any way that "God was smiling down on us and calmed the wind" or anything like that, it was a nice coincidence."

Hero, aged 15, at Britain Yearly Meeting (Quakers) from an article in The Friend Magazine September 2005

Social justice and an ethic of "fair shares"

A concern that the gap between the wealthy few and the impoverished many is a primary cause of degradation of both the planet and of the social systems it supports, is shared by many faiths. The Sikhs' statement of faith includes the belief that the social justice crisis is caused by humanity's confrontation with itself, and the environmental crisis is caused by humanity's confrontation with nature.

“He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour remains hungry by his side.” Hadith (saying of the Prophet Mohammed PBUH)

Paying the *zakaat*, (one of the five pillars of Islam) or the ‘poor due’, once a year. This is not charity but the right of the poor and is fixed at a minimum of two and a half per cent of one’s earnings.

4. A note on communication

An important issue that has surfaced during this research is the extent to which faith groups are (and have always been) ‘out of the loop’ in terms of general sustainable development communication and information dissemination. Apart from biodiversity-linked projects such as ‘Living Churchyards’, and some social welfare projects, there appears to be little reporting of what might be termed faith-based sustainable development.

By contrast, faith-based regeneration is a growing and well resourced area (often through Neighbourhood Renewal / Office of the Deputy Prime Minister funding), engaging with black and minority ethnic communities. Such work also offers links to Hindu and Sikh communities, where information on what is happening on sustainable development has proved harder to uncover.

There is such modesty about achievements that there seems almost to be under-reporting. Reporting on achievements and disseminating this information is a key issue if recognition is to be achieved for faith-based or faith-encouraged sustainable development.

Part 2 A review of current practice

5. Developing practice - positive action on the sustainable development agenda

Many environmental and social faith-based initiatives are in progress, but are not yet under the ‘sustainable development’ banner. Key areas of activity are:

- Climate change and transition to a low carbon economy
- Trade justice and social / environmental justice issues; and
- Efforts towards more conscious consuming and ethical living.

In some cases, such as Fair Trade, there is a long history of involvement at both the local and institutional levels, with faith communities motivated by a clear moral and ethical imperative.

5.1 International work

There is plenty of international material to inform and inspire national work. One of the most fundamental texts remains the major faiths’ Assisi Declaration on protecting the natural world, developed out of the 1986 WWF International Conference. Other useful sources of material include the World Faiths Dialogue, and the 1999 World Council of Churches Climate Change Programme, and its earlier work on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions also ran a series of conferences on faiths and the environment (www.hds.harvard.edu/csww/).

Many faith groups were actively involved in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) a decade later.

The World Council of Churches convened a seminar in 1974 to respond to the Club of Rome's report, the Limits to Growth, as themes of good governance, social justice and environmental limits strongly resonated with the tenets of faith groups across the globe.

International interfaith projects include the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement's 'Alternatives to Consumerism,' and the WWF/Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC) work on 'Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet'. European projects include work on climate change and the impact of science and technology by the World Council of Churches, and the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN). The ECEN's 2004 theological consultation on the environment stressed the need for deeper study of the New Testament, more efforts to link church liturgies with creation, and action against unsustainable consumption.

5.2 National and regional work

Nationally, Christian church leaders have written and spoken about ecological concerns, although in a somewhat piecemeal fashion. Each Diocese in the Church of England now has an Environment Liaison Officer, an unpaid post open to any clergy or lay person able to advise their Bishop on environmental matters.

Churches Together In Britain and Ireland (CTBI) was created to promote joint working and avoid duplication on key social, political and economic areas of interest. CTBI is also a member of the Environmental Issues Network (EIN), at which environmental representatives of the different church denominations

meet three times a year to share their experiences.

The Society, Religion and Technology Project (SRT) of the Church of Scotland has for 35 years provided informed comment and debate on ethical issues such as bioethics, sustainable development, climate change and science's role in society.
<http://www.srtp.org.uk/srtpage3.shtml>

Fazlun Khalid's work in setting up the UK-based Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (Example 8) has raised sustainable development issues within the UK Muslim faith community.

Faith communities were involved, with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) support, in the sustainable development strategy review process in July 2004. Community Environmental Associates-run event sought to encourage more individual inputs from different faiths as well as a collective response.

Regeneration is the most significant area in which faiths already play a major role. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has extensively involved faith groups in the Neighbourhood Renewal programme to act as 'honest brokers' in community development work. Christian Aid works with UK Black Majority Churches, while the Church Urban Fund has enabled a wide range of community projects in marginalised areas. England's Regional Development Agencies have a sustainable development remit and are increasingly engaging with faith communities on these issues.

5.3 Local work

Most faith-led initiatives are delivered at local level. New local governance structures such as Local Strategic Partnerships offer additional opportunities for faith groups to bring moral and ethical concerns to the table.

Many faith groups are members of Community Empowerment Networks in the 88 areas where these exist.

6. Faith group engagement in specific aspects of sustainable development

Whilst sustainable development is by definition a holistic, interconnecting agenda, this section explores faith groups' activities under the following broad headings:

- 6.1 Education, information and awareness-raising about sustainable development
- 6.2 Acting responsibly – faith groups as resource managers, employers and purchasers
- 6.3 Energy and climate change
- 6.4 Moving towards sustainable consumption
- 6.5 The global agenda: trade justice and tackling world poverty
- 6.6 Faith and the social and economic agendas
- 6.7 Promoting people's well-being and health

6.1 Education, information and awareness-raising about sustainable development

"But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the sky, they will tell you; or speak to the earth, it will teach you; the fish of the sea, they will inform you." The Book of Job 12:7-8

Most of those involved in work on faith and sustainability see education and awareness-raising as a central aspect of their work, especially appropriate during the current UN Decade of Education on Sustainable Development.

Examples of Christian initiatives

- **The Eco-Congregation project** was launched in 1990 as the Churches Environment Campaign. Initially

supported by ENCAMS, it is now run from the Arthur Rank Centre, the churches' ecumenical resource unit at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh Park. The programme inspires local churches to understand environmental issues and creation care within the context of the Christian faith, and to take practical action. A simple environmental audit helps congregations assess their current activities and plan future priorities. Resource modules integrate environmental care into various areas of church life, from worship to procurement to local community initiatives.

Around 250 churches have committed themselves to 'greening' initiatives, of which 36 have gained an 'Eco-Congregation Award'. The campaign has helped to raise the profile of environmental issues in national church life. Uptake is heavily focused on the Church of England; less than five per cent of the member parishes are Catholic.

Eco-Congregation in Evesham

In 2002, Evesham Methodist Church was one of the first churches to win one of the national Eco-Congregation award after members of the congregation combined their faith with a love of the environment. The initial drive came from a retired conservation architect and keen organic gardener who became known as the "Green Apostle". He began by introducing simple aluminium can and tin foil recycling facilities, followed by paper, stamps, spectacles and mobile phones. Encouraging members of the congregation to clear out their garages, the church started collecting non-ferrous materials for recycling, raising over £1,800 for the church refurbishment fund.

Members have planted flowers and shrubs in the church grounds and developed a new wildlife area on the banks of the River Avon. They have also advised a local nursery school on combating litter and organised a clean-up involving staff, parents and pupils.

- Devolution has prompted the development of **Eco-Congregation Scotland**. Delivered by a partnership between Keep Scotland Beautiful and the **Society, Religion and Technology Project (SRTP) of the Church of Scotland**, it is endorsed by **Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS)** and funded by the Scottish Executive's Sustainable Action Fund.
- **Christian Ecology Link (CEL)** is the most developed independent environmental organisation within the faiths sector. (See page 26) www.christian-ecology.org.uk
- **Green Apostles** is the Methodist Church's national environmentalist network, offering resources including an Energy Study Pack.
- **The John Ray Initiative** is a Christian educational charity with a mission to promote responsible environmental stewardship and the wise use of science and technology. Many of its members are leading figures in the worlds of science and technology, committed to developing a deeper understanding of human interaction with the environment, and stimulating action for sustainable development. Current initiatives include work on global climate change and sustainable consumption.
- **The Conservation Foundation** has worked in partnership with the Church of England on a number of projects, including Yews for the Millennium, the Parish Pump

network of local environmental contacts, and a series of awareness raising workshops on the local implications of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Small Parish Pump priming awards are available for practical action.

Devon Churches Green Action, coordinated by the Council for Church and Society

This is an ecumenical Christian regional and local faith network promoting awareness of ecological issues among Devon churches and communities, and encouraging people to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. Using the Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation process as a theological framework, its aim is to "create and enhance communities that are inclusive and sustainable, and provide a vision and practice for living together in different ways." One and a half paid staff lead partners such as a local Primary Care Trust, the Mothers' Union, Exeter College, and Magna Housing on projects such as purchasing and ethical investment.

- **Conferences** include 'Down to Earth – the challenge of sustainability' (Bishops Palace, Wells, Sept 04) and 'Faith and Environment' (Christians Aware, Jan 05), which also included workshops on Jewish, Hindu and Sikh perspectives on the environment.
- **South West Churches Regional Forum Transport Working Group** produced a paper entitled 'Faith and Mobility: moving as if our beliefs matter'.

The Environment Group of Churches Together in Cumbria has produced a series of discussion papers on topics such as sustainability; water; farming; Christ in creation; enough; globalisation and multi-nationals; leisure, tourism and the environment; and visioning. These are available from the group by post: The Jays, 3 White House, Walton, Brampton, Cumbria CA82DJ

Examples of Muslim initiatives

- The Mugdock Country Park **Muslim summer school** was organised in Glasgow in 2004 by the **BTCV Scotland** 'Positive Images' project. 80 young Muslims explored biodiversity, the environment and their faith, entering competitions and filming short video clips. A tree was donated as a gift to the Earth.

The Imaad project and 'Islam and Our Environment'

The Arabic word for 'pillar', Imaad is a forum for young Muslim professionals to share their knowledge, strengths and resources to build a stronger, more successful Muslim community. In October 2003, Imaad ran an event on 'Islam and Our Environment', with a speaker from the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, and a Muslim environmental officer from Reading Borough Council. Event materials are available at www.imaad.org/events_islam&environment.htm

Examples of Jewish initiatives

- **The Noah Project** - Jewish Education, Celebration and Action for the Earth - is committed to raising awareness of environmental issues through

education, celebration of Jewish festivals, and practical projects. An independent, non-profit making project, run by volunteers and funded solely by donations, it encourages Jews "to take a lead in environmental responsibility, and add a Jewish voice to the secular and interfaith environmental movements." This project should not be confused with the Noah Project on Climate Change. (See page 23)

Interfaith initiatives

- **ARC's Sacred Land Project** unites many faiths. Launched in 1997 by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, the project reminds people of the sacred potential of their local landscape, reviving old and creating new sacred sites in Britain and overseas. Sacred Land in Britain has prompted Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and secular communities to enjoy inner-city and community gardens, holy wells, pilgrimage trails, trees and woodlands, and to celebrate these places with art and poetry. Supported by WWF and the major UK faiths, at an international level it links with ARC's Sacred Gifts and Sacred Seas projects.

Global Education

'Seeds of Change'

Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Buddhist movement, are active Earth Charter supporters and sponsored an educational video, the 'Quiet Revolution', covering key environmental challenges and inspiring case studies of action for change, including Earth Charter Commissioner Wangari Maathai's Green Belt work. SGI-UK has produced a 'Seeds of Change' exhibition (touring 5-6 UK cities over next 2 years) and hope to engage as many local councils and schools as possible.

- **North-South twinning** is a means of establishing a closer connection between communities in different parts of the world.
- Since 2002, the Catholic-based Justice and Peace groups at St Francis de Sales in Newbury have supported a twinned parish in Zambia and a linked project with South Africa, through the wiring of schools organised by the Valley Trust, a South African NGO.
- The Diocese of Ripon and Leeds Global Education Project offers a global dimension to the diocesan schools with resources, training and classroom support, including links with schools in Sri Lanka.
- Based within United Reformed Church buildings, Development Education in Dorset (DEED) promotes citizenship and education for sustainable development work through its close relationship with the church.
- **One World Week (OWW)** is one of the longest-running projects in this field. Established in 1978 as a development education programme, it promotes a week of activities each year around United Nations Day (24th October), involving as diverse a cross-section of society as possible. Currently run through the World Development Movement Trust, but working to become an independent charity, it is sponsored by the members of the Churches World Development Network.

6.2 Acting responsibly – Building and site management, employers and purchasers

Ethical investment

Investment issues are complex and varied for faith communities. The Church

of England and Church of Scotland have an ethical policy excluding investment in arms, pornography, gambling, alcohol, tobacco, and newspapers. The Commissioners are guided by the Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIRIS), which also advises the Church of England Pensions Board and the Methodist Church. The Church of England investment policy has been used as a model for other churches.

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/ethical/>

Popular banking options include The Ecology Building Society and Triodos. Triodos is an independent ethical bank with its roots in anthroposophical movements and only lends money to “organisations which create real social, environmental and cultural value.”

Triodos also offers savers a chance to invest in specific areas through targeted accounts e.g. Friends of the Western Buddhist Order Dana Account.

<http://www.ecology.co.uk/>

<http://www.triodos.co.uk/>

International Interfaith Investment Group - 3iG

3iG are developing a large scale, socially responsible investment scheme for religious funds. The brainchild of ARC, 3iG estimate that 11 of the world’s leading religions own an estimated seven per cent of the habitable surface of the planet, and represent four and a half billion people.

3iG members include heavyweights such as the US United Methodist Pension Board, which has already committed \$13 billion to socially responsible investments. Board members of 3iG include: Zoroastrian, Jewish and Muslim foundations, Hindu organisations, the World Council of Churches and the

Interfaith Centre on Corporate Responsibility, a coalition of 275 faith-based institutional investors. Major bank Citicorp is one of the key funders of the venture and WWF International offers assistance.
<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectId=48>

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Work on CSR has evolved in part from ethical investment. In an address suggesting that people should be taxed on what they use of the Earth's resources, not what they earn, Bishop James Jones called on business to "embrace an ethic of the earth and a greater sense of social responsibility" (The Guardian, 22 November 2004). One key aspect of CSR is ensuring workers' rights throughout the supply chain, and faith communities have worked with trade unions on a number of projects in this area.

- **CAFOD's 'Clean up your Computer' campaign** was launched in January 2004 to draw attention to workers' conditions in the international computer and electronic goods sectors. Hewlett-Packard, Dell and IBM responded to campaigners' postcards and electronic messages by improving workers' protection from discrimination and maintaining their right to join an independent trade union. Church member involvement also played a role in encouraging Nike to reform their supply standards.

TELCO - The East London Communities Organisation (London Citizens)

This alliance of more than 35 faith groups, churches, mosques, trade unions, community groups and schools shows what can be achieved when

people act together for better local neighbourhoods and social justice.

Successes include:

- The Living Wage campaign securing decent pay and benefits for manual workers such as cleaners within City of London businesses
- Local 'clean-up' campaigns on issues of cleanliness, crime, local business, dignity and respect for all who work and live in the area
- Work schemes for the young; and
- An affordable housing campaign.

Buildings and site management

The Church Commissioners manage the assets of the Church of England, which in 2003 were estimated to be worth £3.9 billion. They also own about 125,000 acres of agricultural land, making the Church one of the country's largest landowners. But with this wealth comes commitments to maintain buildings (many very old) and maintain an infrastructure, for which relatively little funding is available. All faiths face similar problems in raising money, and some face extra ones. Muslims cannot operate in the traditional UK mortgage system, and must raise funds in advance to buy property.

Many faith centres incorporate sustainability principles into new or rehabilitated buildings. The Heritage Lottery Fund plays a key role in restoration work. Communities with a faith base such as Findhorn Scotland and places of worship such as the Tibetan Buddhist Samye Ling Retreat Centre on Holy Island in Scotland are high profile examples. Samye Ling's initiative has forged alliances with non-Buddhist institutions and organisations and has a considerable architectural reputation, winning a major architectural prize in 1994.

The 'environmental diocese' of Manchester

The Diocese of Manchester encompasses the homes of two million people. It is working to become Britain's leading 'environmental diocese' under a plan sponsored by WWF and brokered by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). The diocese hopes to increase awareness and action on lifestyle, socially responsible investment, renewable energy, recycling, energy-efficient travel, purchasing choices, and sustainable use of natural resources.

The diocese owns 355 churches as well as halls, churchyards, administrative buildings, schools, vicarages, glebe land and other properties.

By implementing a sustainability plan across all these areas, significant cost savings are likely eg. from energy saving measures, in addition to the environmental and social benefits.

The plan is being driven by the Bishop of Hulme, the Rt. Rev. Stephen Lowe, a key figure in promoting the role of the church in urban regeneration, and involves other faiths in the region.

Making full use of buildings

Buildings owned and managed by faith groups have long been places of community, as highlighted in the case studies of the Church Urban Fund's (CUF) report 'Building on Faith: Faith Buildings in Neighbourhood Renewal' (2004). Through its financial support, the CUF promotes the valuable role faith buildings can play in local services provision, offering safe places for people to come together "which is an essential prerequisite for any kind of community development and a locus for sustainability."

Friends Meeting Houses - centres of community sustainability

Quaker Meeting Houses have always been used as a centre of community and act as subtle sustainability promoters through notice board displays and use of Fair Trade and eco-friendly products. The Quaker Green Action network produces a series of information sheets, aiming "to persuade those in charge of Meeting Houses to follow these gentle paths consistently in all the choices they have to make. Our buildings will then witness to our testimonies on simplicity and integrity."

Churchyards and sacred grounds

Churchyards and sacred grounds can contain a rich diversity of local flora and fauna, as well as being places of historic interest.

- The **Living Churchyards Project**, now co-ordinated by the Arthur Rank Centre, endorses 6,000 burial grounds as 'sacred sanctuaries' for both the living and the dead, through environmental management practices such as banning the use of pesticides, and a single annual mowing. The scheme has spread to municipal cemeteries and some Muslim and Hindu communities.
- The **Environment Agency** is developing a policy on funeral practices and the environment, in close consultation with faith communities.
- The **Tree Council** has information on interfaith tree services, and 'Trees and Faith' is a new feature of the Tree Council's National Tree Week.

Yorkshire Living Churchyards: a joint project

Yorkshire Living Churchyards is a joint venture between Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of York to promote churchyard management sympathetic to 'native' plants and animals. Surveys, management plans, practical help and seminars are all part of volunteers' learning experience, replicated throughout Yorkshire. The original catalyst in the mid 1980's was Dr John Habgood, then Archbishop of York whose wildlife interest led the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to organise a seminar addressed by Sir David Attenborough.

Adamsdown Dig & Plant – Digging for the future

In urgent need of a makeover, the memorial garden at St German's Church in Adamsdown, Cardiff, saw the whole community involved in its restoration, with the support of BTCV. Local people from three to 60 years old worked enthusiastically on replanting the flowerbeds, and BTCV provided advice on tools and on-going garden maintenance. Support came from other partners including the Cardiff Housing Association, the Adamsdown Resource Centre, and Adamsdown Forum, and the renewed church grounds are now an attractive area enjoyed by the whole community.

The Balaji Temple project

This BTCV project is creating a 'sacred land' site around the Hindu Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple in Tipton, forming closer links between the temple and the local community and combining religious activities with arts, health and environmental events. Built on twelve and a half acres of former landfill site, the local council has used new legislative powers to create a village green beside the site, close to the main road. Site access has been improved and nearly 2,000 indigenous trees have been planted, as well as a holy pine from Southern India. The site now hosts a series of events for the whole community, including celebrations on the anniversary of the opening of the Ganesha Shrine at the Temple, the Holi Festival every spring, art installations, and an annual historical canal walk.

Purchasing and procurement

There is no shortage of information on green purchasing, and much is as relevant to faith groups as other areas of society, were it easily available to them.

Leading by example

In March 2004, Methodist Church House in London switched to green electricity, after the Head of Administration presented a "Going Green" report to the building management committee. He said: "It's us doing what we can. I negotiated this contract via a broker, and the same broker will endeavour to make green energy available to all our churches throughout the UK."

Having a formal policy for ethical and / or sustainable purchasing assists the activities of faith-based schemes such as Traidcraft and helps mainstream the message. Formal policies are often required by public funders, although many faith groups are unsure about how to develop them.

New enterprise and employment

New forms of enterprise, socially responsible business ventures, and initiatives such as Time Banks, are all linked in various ways to faith communities. Industrial missions (ecumenical organisations) could play a prominent role in this area.

Right Livelihood businesses – Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO)

“Joyful is the accumulation of good work.” The Buddha

Established by Buddhists to “create environments where we can live ethical lives to the fullest possible extent, with others who share our values and aspirations”, Right Livelihood ventures include vegetarian restaurants, organic food shops, complementary health centres, printing and design, bookshops, accountancy, arts and crafts, and gardening. (See page 31)

Right Livelihood also provides a significant opportunity to engage with the non-Buddhist world, to practise Buddhist teachings in a social context, and to make work a tool of personal transformation. “By engaging in economic activity we interact with non-Buddhists in ways we would not if we confined ourselves to monasteries, or even Buddhist centres. People who might otherwise never meet a Buddhist – customers, suppliers, bank executives, lawyers – come into contact with us, and we consistently work so that this contact leaves them with a positive impression.”

6.3 Energy and climate change

“We talk a lot, pray a bit, but don’t do much about climate change. What the Churches need is a vision for the future – and courage. (John Kennedy, The Guardian 9 October 2004)

Climate change is the most significant environmental issue we face today and a growing sense of action is emerging from faith groups. With a particular sensitivity to justice issues, many faith groups, particularly the Christian church, support the principle of ‘contraction and convergence’, proposing a fairer share of carbon use between the developed and developing world.

- **Christian Ecology Link’s Operation Noah climate change campaign** launched the Climate Covenant in October 2004, committing churches and individuals to take action against global warming. With partners including Global Action Plan, this initiative is proving popular at a local level, and is well-resourced by the standards of the voluntary sector(see ‘Ark in a Box’ below).

Ark in a box

‘Ark in a box’ is the web-based resource centre for Operation Noah, providing an accessible set of downloadable materials focusing on:

- The Climate Covenant and background information
- ‘Asking the government to lead decisive international action’

- 'Showing you mean business by doing your bit'
- 'Everything you need to create a climate of justice for the poor and future generations.'

Ready-made presentations can be downloaded, and would-be presenters can call a helpline for advice and additional information on **01252 849904** - 10am-6pm

- The **Scottish Churches' Energy Efficiency Scheme**, formed in 1980, reports that over two thirds of Church of Scotland churches (and other denominations) have taken part in the **Scottish Churches' Energy Savings Scheme**, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving an estimated £0.75 million every year.
- **CRED** is a local carbon reduction programme based at the University of East Anglia, hoping to sign up 600 churches in Norfolk to photovoltaic arrays. Unlike houses, churches tend to be built with a common orientation, providing large south-facing roofs ideal for harnessing solar energy.
- **Devon Churches Energy Network** is encouraging and supporting churches involved in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Devon Churches Green Action has produced a report titled 'Climate Change and the Devon Churches,' which proposes ways in which churches and parishes can work on this issue and develop more sustainable communities.
- **Lincolnshire churches** are hoping to become autonomous energy churches, and have completed a feasibility study on a low carbon energy-efficient demonstration building to generate business and

community opportunities. Funding is now being sought.

Muslims are faith also active on energy issues.

- **Be Fikr**, (Warm and Cosy) is a Birmingham-based home energy awareness and action project run out of a local mosque, providing training in practical action for those living in poor quality private housing, and particularly for women in purdah. (See page 25)
- **The Muslim Khatri Association**, Leicester have transformed their community centre into a sustainable building using a large photovoltaic system and a range of energy efficiency technologies. (See Page 34)

6.4 Moving towards sustainable consumption

"Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?"
Quaker, Advices and Queries, 1994, No. 41

"For consumers of the earth's resources there is no check on our profligacy; we are so removed from the consequences of our actions that we live comfortably in denial, ignoring the prophets of doom who predict an impending crisis of epic proportions." Bishop James Jones, The Guardian 22 November 2004

Case study 1

Be Fikr: A Muslim project to make Balsall Heath 'warm and cosy'

"He created everything, and then He ordained it very exactly." Qu'ran 25:2

"There is no changing Allah's creation. That is the true religion; but most people do not know." Qu'ran 30:29

Mrs Ahmed stands proudly in her disabled husband's new ground floor bedroom and bathroom and explains, "I painted both rooms here myself, and my fellow students built the garden wall and helped with the plumbing." Whilst basic DIY skills may not be the most obvious route into sustainable development, that's exactly what the Be Fikr ('Warm and Cosy') project, based at the Al-Hira Community College in Balsall Heath, Birmingham, is delivering.

In an area of intense deprivation, where several generations live together in privately-owned housing, poor quality living conditions have a major impact on health and well-being. Funded by New Opportunities Fund SEED programme money from 2002-4, the Be Fikr project provided training in security measures and energy efficiency, designed to save energy, reduce bills, and prevent cold and damp-related health problems.

Course leader Shabbir Ahmed soon realised the need for NVQ training in basic repairs and maintenance, plumbing, electrics, plastering, and decorating. "I found it very challenging at first to see the level of poverty and the lack of basic education some of our students suffer," he admits. "Teaching people who cannot read or write in any language was a new experience for me, and it was very difficult saying no to people who really needed someone to come and do urgent repair work for them. But the results have been wonderful, and some of our students have even established their own plumbing and building businesses." Training for women, including those following the tradition of purdah, was a priority, and although it was initially difficult to find women tutors, a former student was subsequently employed to teach her new skills.

Created in the mid 1980s from a derelict piano factory, the Al-Hira Community College is run by the Hazrat Sultan Bahu Trust, whose aim is 'to fulfil the religious, educational, social and spiritual needs of the Muslim community.' Trust President Rafaqat Hussain explains that this faith-based approach implicitly includes care for the environment. "Much of our work is to do with sustainable development, but in the past we haven't packaged it under 'environmental issues', it is simply part of our identity and our ethos of serving the community and maintaining the Qu'ranic teaching of 'balance'."

As a lead member of the Balsall Heath Forum, the Trust has an on-going commitment to improving the local environment, organising children's litter picks, promoting gardening, and reporting graffiti and rubbish problems to the local council. Hussain stresses that the Trust is well-placed to take a lead on such issues. "Because we are already at the heart of the community, we can get the messages out very effectively, and through education, our students become more empowered to act."

Although SEED funding has now finished, the Trust hopes to continue the Be Fikr work on a part time basis. Students are now learning their skills on the job, refurbishing an old garment factory as a satellite college building in the Lozells area, scene of the riots in 1985. The site will offer many courses including ICT, English and Urdu, fashion, healthcare and basic skills. Hussain hopes that the new site will act as a catalyst for further regeneration of Lozells: "Environmental and youth projects are our two priorities for the future. We hope the partnership model will work here too."

Faith groups are perhaps better placed than any other group in society to take up the Gandhian idea of 'live simply that others may simply live', and to challenge consumerism. Consumerism is indeed often described as the new religion, and UK shopping centres and warehouses are certainly drawing large 'congregations' at weekends.

Although unsustainable consumption and production were raised as important issues in 1992, the lack of action by 2002 prompted the World Summit on Sustainable Development to urge every nation to develop strategies for sustainable consumption and production. UK Government's 'Securing the Future' sustainable development strategy addresses these issues.

- In its November 2004 report, the **Oxford Commission on Sustainable Consumption** published specific recommendations on consumption for religious communities, alongside government, the media and NGOs.
- The **Quaker Living Witness** project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, supports Friends' corporate witness to sustainable living. Weekend gatherings generate a shared understanding of the group's hopes, reflect on experiences of Quaker witness to sustainability, and develop participants' skills in facilitating projects and processes. Action includes study groups, public campaigning, environmental projects, and helping children understand sustainability. An example from Quaker Dorking Meeting House is included.
- **London Sustainability Exchange** is (LSx) developing a pilot project to explore faith communities' influence on sustainable behaviour and consumption, as part of their 'Motivate London' work on sustainable lifestyles. LSx has

undertaken a mapping exercise of faith communities' action, and is developing plans to launch a faith pilot project with the Muslim community.

- **Christian Ecology Link's LOAF Principles** encourages churches to buy food that is Locally produced, Organically grown, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. www.christian-ecology.org.uk

6.5 The global agenda: trade justice and tackling world poverty

"Happy are they who hunger and thirst for what is right; they shall have their fill." (Mathew 5:6)

Faith groups have been central to work on global development for as long as such work has been done, right back to the campaign to end UK support for slavery. There are many faith-based development agencies touching upon sustainable development issues including CAFOD, Christian Aid, Tear Fund, Muslim Aid, Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) and Methodist Relief and Development Fund (MRDF). Action by local supporters of these agencies was central to the success of the Jubilee 2000 and the One World Week initiative.

As well as work on 'traditional' global development and poverty, there is a strong voice from faith-based communities in two related, but distinct areas: trade justice and fair trade.

Case study 2

Partners in Creation: Exploring environmental responsibility through Jewish teaching

"Upon creating the first human beings, God guided them around the Garden of Eden saying, 'Look at my creations. See how beautiful and perfect they are. Do not desecrate or corrupt my world. For if you corrupt it, there will be no-one to set it right after you.'" Talmud

One of only 13 projects worldwide to win a 'Sacred Gift' award from the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, Partners in Creation promotes environmental awareness and action amongst the UK Jewish community.

Neville Sassienie is a member of the UK Board of Deputies Community Issues Division and explains how the project came about. "The Board of Deputies leads on issues affecting the Jewish community, such as education, health, anti-Semitism, and preserving the memory of the Holocaust. Although these are vital, they are not terribly happy subjects, and I wanted something that was inspiring and forward-looking that would also engage our young people. Although it isn't a uniquely Jewish issue, the environment fitted the bill perfectly, and we called the project Partners in Creation because the way God works in creation is through human hands."

In establishing Partners in Creation, the Board of Deputies teamed up with the Noah Project. Each partner brought complementary assets - the Noah Project had a good track record of linking environmental issues with Jewish festivals, and the Board had the contacts to distribute ideas throughout the Jewish community and to start to raise funds.

To date the project has developed environmental action programmes for the home, the synagogue and the workplace, and is looking for a publisher for a teaching resource for use in *chedarim* (religious classes) and Jewish primary schools. With a website due to go live by the end of 2005, these programmes will be delivered through interactive quizzes, factsheets and discussion pages.

And to get young people away from their computers and experiencing the natural world for themselves, they are importing a successful initiative from the US charity, Chazon. Tikun Trek (meaning 'Heal the world') is a 24 hour hike or bike ride through leafy Suffolk, exploring environmental issues and Jewish teaching, and raising sponsorship money for community projects. And Tikun Trek is the perfect prelude for August's Limmudfest, billed as four days in the countryside to find inspiration for participants' personal and Jewish journeys, in the run up to the Jewish New Year.

Getting this far hasn't been easy. Funding remains an ever-present worry, and as Sassienie admits, the intangible nature of the environmental crisis doesn't help. "The Jewish community has always led the way on looking after the elderly and the sick. And internationally, people concentrate on famine and debt relief because it seems more immediate. But whilst climate change may be our greatest global challenge in the long term, graffiti on the local synagogue wall is a far more real threat for our community." But Sassienie is optimistic. "I'm an old guy, but my children are far more switched on to environmental issues and they are teaching us. And they must, because their future is bleak unless sustainable development catches on."

www.limmud.org/about

- **Tear Fund** has launched the 'Whose Earth?' campaign as 'an opportunity for Christians to take up the challenge of living on God's earth God's way.' Encouraging people to 'make lifestyle choices for the benefit of people and the planet' and urge their politicians to do the same, the campaign provides background information on global issues such as water and sanitation, and Bible study and prayer pointers. Climate change and ethical living are other TearFund campaigning areas.
- **The Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR)** is an international charity working for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. Founded in 1940, and rooted in gospel values and a progressive Catholic tradition, it is independent of official church structures, and works in cross-sector partnerships with people of all faiths and none. CIIR runs an environmental advocacy project highlighting the connections between the environment and development, and its *'Living Lightly on the Earth'* pamphlet is regarded as the best current work from the Catholic Church on this subject. http://www.ciir.org/shared_asp_files/uploadedfiles/%7B95D20D42-1544-451F-834B-93526C8A41AB%7D_Env_reflection.pdf
- Both **Christian Aid** and **Oxfam** are development NGOs active on poverty in the UK. Christian Aid has been instrumental in increasing church activity around regeneration, and its innovative 2004 'How to recycle a goat' scheme attracted a significant response. <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/>
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/>
- **Water Aid** has won strong commitment from UK churches. <http://www.wateraid.org.uk/>
- **UNICEF** is working increasingly closely with Buddhist, Muslim and Christian communities whose beliefs encompass an interest in people's health and well-being, particularly children. <http://www.unicef.org.uk/>
- A 2003 statement from the **Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales** and the **Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland on Trade and Solidarity** reflects on the status of international trade rules, the prevailing institutional structures, the promise of the fair trade movement and the links with the social teaching of the Catholic Church, in particular, the universal common good. http://www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk/nm/publish/news_23.html
- **CAFOD** is the official development and relief agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It plays a key role in tackling poverty and social injustice, but does not speak for the whole of the Catholic faith community on sustainable development. <http://www.cafod.org.uk/>
- **The Kent and the Wider World initiative**
Kent and the Wider World (KWW) is a development education centre working to raise awareness of the connections between people in Kent and Medway and the rest of the world, especially the majority world. Work with faith communities is key, with several paid staff providing environment and development resources and training, in conjunction with Christian Aid, Oxfam and DFID. With a mailing list of 500 individuals and a number of

LEAs and schools, KWW's believes its impact has been 'noticeable, but difficult to measure', constrained by limited resources.

<http://www.commonwork.org/KWW/default.htm>

Driving the fair trade agenda

This is an obvious area where faith institutions can make a difference in their own purchasing policy and practice, whilst encouraging their congregation members to do the same at home and at work.

- Church involvement, through Traidcraft stalls in churches and meeting places, has been essential in securing fair trade status for **Exeter, Plymouth and East Devon Councils**.
- In the **Liverpool** area, faith communities have been very active in driving the fair trade agenda in local towns, with 35 per cent of Anglican parishes and the United Reform Church's Mersey Synod now 'fair trade'.

6.6 Faith and the social and economic agendas

Regeneration of local communities

Local regeneration is an area where UK faith groups have historically been most active, and their potential is recognised in the Government White Paper (DETR, 2000) which highlights that "faith communities command resources – people, networks, organisations, buildings – of great potential for regeneration and neighbourhood renewal."

- **Operation Eden** in Liverpool (page) is an excellent example of faiths taking a leading role in local regeneration, with a holistic, sustainable development perspective.

- New networks such as the interfaith **Faith-Based Regeneration Network** will develop this work further.

Faith communities' involvement in regional and local governance

"Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand." Quaker, Advice and Queries, 1994, No. 34

The Government is promoting 'active citizenship' as a core part of its strategy to strengthen community cohesion. Faith communities are well-placed to remind members of their duty to be active citizens.

There is a growing recognition of the need for faith communities to have adequate representation in new governance structures such as Local

Faith Together in Leeds 11

A grassroots partnership of Christian, Muslim and community organisations came together in 1997 to promote regeneration in Leeds 11. In 2001, the project won a national award from Muslim News for community relations, sponsored by the Cabinet Office, and presented by Tony Blair.

<http://www.faithtogether.org.uk>

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Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). In Liverpool, faith networks have a more powerful voice by working together on the LSPs, and two LSP core group seats in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets are specifically for faith groups. A Rocha's work in London has included support from the LSP in setting up the Southall Sustainability Forum (page 30).

Faith groups are also gaining a stronger voice at regional level.

- The **East of England Faiths Council** (EEFC) provides a nexus point between faith groups and regional governance, allowing different faiths to speak with one voice where possible. The EEFC is currently undertaking extensive research into regional faith community activity, funded by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), following up a 2003 interfaith position paper on planning and regional development.
http://www.eeda.org.uk/embedded_object.asp?docid=1002551
- The **East of England Churches' Network** (the ecumenical liaison point with regional government in the East of England) prepared a 2003 presentation on 'Sustainability in the East of England' and whilst on secondment to the EEDA, Rev Crispin White, Industrial Chaplain to Harlow, developed sustainability indicators and regional statistics in conjunction with Essex Churches Council for Industry and Commerce.
<http://www.eecn.org.uk/sustain.pdf>
- The North West Development Agency's (NWDA) 2004 publication '**Faith in England's Northwest**' was followed in 2005 by the launch of a regional interfaith website, sponsored by the NWDA, and a NW Regional Interfaith Forum. An Economic Impact Assessment is also being developed.
<http://www.faithnorthwest.org.uk/>
- In its 'Sowing the Seeds' report (October, 2003), **The Churches' Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber** (a Christian organisation working with public bodies and faith partners to promote the region) highlighted the responsibility of the church in working with other regeneration partners, particularly on support for

local food production.
<http://www.crc-online.org.uk/>

Other important publications on faith communities and regeneration include: The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust 'Engaging faith communities in urban regeneration' (March 2003); the New Economics Foundation and Church Urban Fund's 'Faiths, Hope and Participation: Celebrating faith groups' role in Neighbourhood Renewal' (September 2001); and the Faith-Based Regeneration Network 'Tools for Regeneration: A holistic approach for faith communities' (2004).
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/>
<http://www.instituteforphilanthropy.org.uk/re5.html>
<http://www.cuf.org.uk/home.htm?sfgdata=4>
<http://www.fbrn.org.uk/>

Case study 3 Windhorse Trading: Business the Buddhist Way

“And think of every living thing without exception: the weak and the strong, from the smallest to the largest, whether you can see them or not, living nearby or far away, beings living now or yet to arise – may all beings become happy in their heart of hearts!” Taken from the Metta Sutta, The Scripture of Lovingkindness

From a market stall to a retail business with an annual turnover of £9 million, Windhorse Trading has an impeccable track record in faith-driven sustainable business. Featured for five years running in *The Independent’s* league table of fastest growing UK companies, Windhorse Trading is a wholesale and retail gifts company, sourcing craft products such as textiles, photo frames, handmade books, wood carvings and ornaments mainly from poorer countries in the East.

Buddhism is central to the business, and guides everything from relationships with suppliers and employees to how to spend the profit, as staff member Ratnaprabha explains. “The business is owned by Windhorse Trust, whose trustees are ordained Buddhists, and they had two main aims in establishing Windhorse Trading: to raise money for Buddhist projects and to create a workplace supportive of our staff’s Buddhist practice. The primary virtue in Buddhism is *Dana*, meaning ‘generosity’. Most of our employees are on a ‘support package’ rather than a salary, living together and effectively working for what they need and giving away the rest. Of last year’s £9 million turnover, £0.4 million was given away in donations, mostly to Buddhist projects but also to education and welfare initiatives in makers’ communities. Our decision to focus on selling gifts is another expression of *Dana*, we are encouraging our customers in their own generous impulses by offering beautiful things for them to give.”

Of around 200 employees in the warehouse and shops, at least 150 are professed Buddhists, and one of Ratnaprabha’s roles is to support the shop teams in their Buddhist spiritual practice. Through discussion meetings, text readings, meditating together and sharing devotional practice around the staffroom shrines, staff are encouraged to put their principles into practice at work as they undertake even the most mundane tasks. But Ratnaprabha acknowledges it has not always been easy. “Our rapid growth meant that people worked too hard and forgot their own needs, but I think that’s common in most highly idealistic businesses. We deliberately stopped growing and consolidated our position, to create more space for personal practice.”

And it’s not just the staff who benefit from this faith-based approach to business. Fairness is another Buddhist precept, ensuring the business pays its bills on time, makes honest statements in its marketing, treats its suppliers ethically and is open about the challenges of monitoring its complex crafts supply chain to ensure trade is fair. Care for the living world is also a key tenet, and the business recycles packaging materials, uses green energy, transports stock by sea not air, and is investigating eco-fuel for its van fleet.

Despite ‘ticking all the boxes’ of sustainable development, Ratnaprabha admits that “our message is low profile, we don’t say ‘Buddhist shops’ or even ‘Fairtrade shops’. We don’t make a fuss about our approach, but customers often comment on the special atmosphere and the personal level of service. We don’t have a proselytising aim, although it’s nice when people are drawn to join our teams to practice spiritually with others.” With its impressive economic performance, proactive environmental position and loving care for its staff, suppliers and customers, Windhorse Trading shows how faith can create a truly sustainable business.

www.windhorse.biz

6.7 Promoting people's well-being and health

'Well-being' is increasingly popular shorthand for personal sustainability, encompassing both health, quality of life, and spiritual concerns. Public health is in many ways a proxy for sustainable development in that both depend upon interlinked economic, environmental and social factors, but making the links with the faith agenda is not common, although faith groups do much health promotion work. There seems to have been little attempt to link this to a spiritual approach within the NHS.

- Successful faith-based **smoking cessation initiatives** are being developed by Primary Care Trusts and Muslim organisations. Imams receive background training, and simple adverts and verses from the Qu'aran are used in Friday prayers to get the message across. Health authorities are continuing and expanding this work. http://www.muslimhealthnetwork.org/news_7.shtm
- Recognising well-being as embracing spiritual needs, **Western Buddhist** organisations help to deliver both conventional and complementary health care, support the hospice movement (e.g. Tibetan-based Rigpa) and offer peace gardens as places for personal reflection. The **Jamyang Centre** in inner city south London runs a community café and garden and is developing a range of community services for carers, people with terminal illnesses and cardiac patients. The **East London Buddhist Centre** is running stress reduction courses and carers' retreats. <http://www.lbc.org.uk/link.htm>
- The fastest-growing area for local action on well-being issues is food growing. Numerous reports and

work by bodies such as the Black Environment Network and the Women's Environment Network have engaged Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in this area. <http://www.ben-network.org.uk/>

6.8 Engagement in practice – case studies of current practice

Throughout the report are case studies of both national and local projects. These are presented as examples that show what can be done and link in various ways to the issues discussed throughout Section 6.

They are by no means unique or 'the best': many of the other cases referred to in the text are equally significant.

The good examples are:

1. Operation Eden
2. The Muslim Khatri Association Community Centre, Leicester
3. The A Rocha UK Living Waterways Project
4. SAGE: Oxford's Christian Environment Group
5. 'Greening the Meeting House': a project of the Dorking Quaker Meeting
6. ENHANCE: the Black Majority Churches Environmental Project pilot study
7. Environments for All in Leicester: working across faiths
8. IFEES: the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences.

Case study 4

St Sidwell's Centre: Building on a Christian heritage of community well-being

"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Psalm 24

"All creation is a song of praise to God." Hildegard of Bingen

Ever since Saint Sidwell's untimely death at the end of a scythe, the parish church bearing her name has had an association with healing - a medicinal spring is said to have risen where her head fell. So what better site for one of the UK's 350 Healthy Living Centres, founded on a Christian vision of a stronger, healthier, more inclusive local community?

The former parish church of St Sidwell's is located in Exeter's Rougemont ward, the second most deprived area of the city with high unemployment and low levels of well-being. Big Lottery funding in 2001 kickstarted a range of projects to make the area more sustainable, with an initial focus on tackling health inequalities. St Sidwell's delivered a range of initiatives for the Primary Care Trust (PCT), including smoking cessation and weight loss programmes, exercise classes, and a young parents' group led by health visitors. The PCT also funded a 'Five A Day' healthy eating co-ordinator, based at St Sidwell's and working across the city.

Good food is a key component of health, and in partnership with BTCV, volunteers created a community garden on waste ground next to the church, growing organic vegetables and offering a new inner city haven for residents and wildlife. Produce from the garden was transformed into tasty, nourishing and affordable meals in the community café, whose kitchen offered training for New Deal students and created local jobs and volunteer opportunities. One wall of the café provided internet access, and in partnership with Exeter College, St Sidwell's offered a wide range of ICT courses taught in small groups in friendly surroundings.

With a conservative estimate of 20,000 user sessions per year, Chris Alford, the Centre Co-ordinator, points to the role the Christian faith has played in St Sidwell's success. "Our overarching theme is tackling social exclusion and health inequalities, in sympathy with the local diocesan agenda. Congregation members are very active volunteers, and the fact that the Centre is a church is obvious! Respecting the heritage of this ancient Christian site is one of the values of the project, and we have retained a working chapel. There's always a risk that, being based in a church, some people may feel excluded, but we have deliberately taken a non-religious approach in our marketing and that's what funders have demanded."

As lottery funding has now ended, St Sidwell's is entering a new phase, improving its own sustainability as a community resource. As Alford explains, "Over the past four years, we have actively nurtured groups such as the parents and toddlers and the 50 Plus Club. They no longer need so much support from us, although they will still use our facilities." This encapsulates the strategic shift from focusing on individual to group development, "because we just can't afford to do as much as before."

Members' responses in the Centre's social audit report offer the most tangible proof of this faith-based project's achievements. "One is particularly aware of the buzz associated with a variety of people doing a variety of things. I have particularly appreciated internet teaching, yoga, and the pleasure the 50 Plus Club gives to my husband." Another member puts it more succinctly - "It's lovely to have a green oasis in unlovely Sidwell Street, and the coffee is an added bonus!"

www.stsidwells.org.uk

1. Operation Eden

Operation Eden is a multi-faith sustainability project piloted throughout the Anglican Diocese of Liverpool, led by local faith representatives at individual places of worship. Steering group members include the Diocese of Liverpool, the Northwest Development Agency, the Environment Agency and Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority. Groundwork and Sefton CVS are also involved.

The initiative grew out of an environment network set up by the Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, and offers support, workshops, and small-scale funding for projects on remediating brownfield land and developing woodland, reducing energy consumption, increasing recycling rates, and enhancing social cohesion. Individuals identify local projects to meet the needs of their faith communities, then, after a sustainability assessment, Operation Eden connects them with potential collaborators in areas such as health, education, the voluntary sector and the local authority. Financial support has been offered to four projects ranging from community food growing to recycling by horse and cart, with training provided on project management, recycling and composting, practical conservation and environmental auditing.

Operation Eden's experience offers valuable lessons. People were drawn to projects which benefited their immediate communities, and allowed them to take action in a group with others. Good news stories travelled fast through the network, and site visits to successful projects created an additional impetus for action. Whilst the environmental element of sustainable development was not always seen as relevant by people with no green space nearby, it was still possible to make the links between local concerns such as

crime and the physical environment.
<http://www.operation-eden.org.uk/>

2. The Muslim Khatri Association Community Centre, Leicester

The Muslim Khatri Association (MKA) is a charity that runs a community centre, preserving Indian traditions for the small Khatri community in Leicester, whilst showcasing the best in energy generation and efficiency. Its refurbished community and educational centre uses a large photovoltaic system, low energy lighting, wall insulation, a heat recovery ventilation system and other environment-friendly features.

In 1999, MKA's ex-warehouse community centre faced a crossroads. Underused and generating little income, it needed both a facelift and a new purpose. Third generation Khatri's joined the management committee, bringing new expertise and suggesting volunteering and life-long learning as ways to tackle local problems and bring more people from the wider community into the building. Impressed by a visit to the ENVIRON Leicester Eco-Home, members showed a 'green' video at meetings and on bus trips, creating a groundswell of interest in taking an environmental approach to the refurbishment.

After further discussion, research and negotiation, a successful application for a feasibility study was made to the NRF Community Chest, after which the Management Committee agreed a grand plan for the building. However, raising the capital funding was a tortuous process, with the East Midlands Development Agency eventually agreeing to provide £25k from SRB funding underspend.

It then became clear that the PV roof would require planning permission because the centre was in a conservation area. Undeterred and

drawing upon the strength of their faith, MKA believed a solution would be found, and a week later they heard that the street might lose its conservation status since too much double glazing had altered its character. Encouraged by this, MKA actively participated in the community-led consultation, the conservation area status was overturned, and PV planning permission was granted. With growing confidence in their ability to make a difference, MKA made other successful funding applications.

The PV system - the biggest in the Midlands - was connected in July 2003. CO₂ savings are estimated at 1535kg per annum. Other features include sensor lighting, internal cavity walls, silver foil lining and linseed flooring. The refurbishment has also brought financial benefits through the creation of broadband-enabled business incubation units in the roof, generating £15k per annum, and 46 English classes every week; the income is spent on new caretakers. The Management Committee aims to be financially self-sustaining by 2010, and is currently generating 25 per cent of what is needed.

The project was a "huge learning curve for everyone" as each new system was installed. Their efforts have since been recognised with:

- 2002 Leicester Council Best Environmental Demonstration Award
- 2003 Queens Jubilee Award for Outstanding Community Contribution
- 2004 Leicester Regeneration East Midlands (Merit).

MKA is happy to have become both a role model and a victim of its own success, fielding many enquiries about energy efficiency, although not funded as an Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEAC). Monthly organised tours have been established to deal with visitors' enquiries in a range of languages, and visitors and students alike experience first hand the sensor lighting and water

efficient taps. Some of the centre's ideas are now being replicated in three other community centres in Leicester, and MKA are providing practical advice and the benefit of their experience to a Hindu community project, so the "learning process is already cascading". MKA are also advising the Confederation of Indian Organisations on an ODPM-funded sustainability project in Leicester, and a Sikh gurdwara on an extension of its property incorporating environment-friendly technology.

MKA highlight that it is common in inner city areas for the environment to come last behind priorities such as education and housing. Their project has helped bring environmental benefits into day to day activities and has also shown that sustainability can generate income, seen by MKA as vital to their long term success.

The MKA see their primary success as involving the whole membership in the hard work, supporting each other through the long hours spent on funding bids and the occasional setbacks. Members' religious faith helps maintain their motivation - efforts to improve others' quality of life will bring rewards in the next life, an additional incentive for much Muslim community work. <http://www.environmentcity.org.uk/article.asp?ParentID=105&ArticleID=115>

3. A Rocha UK Living Waterways Project

A Rocha UK – Portuguese for 'the rock' - is part of an international Christian conservation organisation that works with individuals, churches and organisations of many beliefs and backgrounds. With a focus on science and research, practical conservation and environmental education, projects have been established in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, North and South America and Asia.

Launched in 2001, the first UK project is Living Waterways, creating a greener, cleaner Southall and Hayes, in heavily built-up, multi-racial and culturally diverse West London. The Living Waterways Project acts as a catalyst in helping local communities understand, respect and enjoy their local environment. Objectives include:

- Creation of a Country Park on disused wasteland
- Environmental education work, via school assemblies, clubs and playschemes
- A nature reserve
- A floating classroom on a purpose-built boat on the Grand Union Canal.

Working with local landowners, Hillingdon Council and other community groups, A Rocha UK has turned a 90 acre (36.4 hectare) site into the Minet Country Park, with recreational space, nature conservation areas, and a children's playground. A Rocha provided an ecological impact assessment and coordinated the rubbish clearance. Detailed wildlife surveys identified nearly 100 bird species and 20 butterfly species, making the site one of the most important unprotected wildlife areas in West London, and A Rocha hopes to make a long-term input into the management of this site. The team operates out of a community environmental centre, open to visitors to find out about creation care and sustainable living.

Southall faith communities have welcomed A Rocha, taking the common agenda of 'creation care' as a starting point to build shared values, and in 2002 A Rocha UK established the Southall Sustainability Forum as a network to promote sustainability amongst community leaders. The benefits were "to make us as an organisation accountable to the wider community in terms of our own priorities and effectiveness, and, more importantly, to try and create an agenda for sustainability in Southall amongst key

stakeholders – faith leaders, business leaders, head teachers, councillors, community organisations, the police etc." The Forum links in to the Local Strategic Partnership and has been partly funded through it. The Forum meets quarterly and attendance varies according to the subject matter. The Director of A Rocha comments that one of the most interesting discussions explored "Who belongs in Southall?" This demonstrated the importance of ensuring end users "feel a strong sense of ownership of the project – people will work hard toward an end if they feel they have some ownership and self-direction."

A Rocha also produces a bi-annual community newsletter called SHARE (Southall & Hayes Action to Renew the Environment). End users, members and Southall Community Alliance are helping with project evaluation. Informally they indicate that their work has had a 'noticeable' impact on both the target audience and within the wider community.

http://www.ben-network.org.uk/participation/green_spaces/gs_more_info/Minet.html

4. SAGE: Oxford's Christian Environment Group

Describing themselves as a 'loose network', SAGE was established in 1990 by a few concerned individuals who felt that "very few Christians appeared to be interested in the environment". Based at St. Aldate's, an evangelical Anglican church in the centre of Oxford, SAGE has now spread into many churches of all denominations in the area, and original members feel that they are having a noticeable impact upon other local Christians.

Whilst taking a deliberate decision not to raise substantial funding or seek paid staff, SAGE believes it is one of the most active local Christian environmental groups in the country. "Generally a

person gets an idea, asks a few others for support, and actions it!" There are a range of ongoing and one-off projects:

- Practical conservation at a local reserve
- Prayer meetings, socials and 'Walk with the Creator' country walks
- Taking part, leading or speaking in church services or other meetings
- Publications including a thrice-yearly Sage Words newsletter, Bible Studies, and a website, also used by other local Christian projects
- Holidays and retreats
- Supporting national organisations' local project delivery
- Creativity days.

SAGE's most visible impact has been the restoration of a derelict Victorian cemetery in East Oxford. Creating a green space for everyone to enjoy demonstrates faith outreach in action, and the project reached across the social divide, attracting volunteers who do not attend the church. Project partners include: Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum, BTCV, local wildlife trust (BBONT), WREN (landfill tax), East Oxford Action (SRB) and the Conservation Foundation.

SAGE believe that the "key to success is not to get competitive - collaboration is the best way forward", and that "small is beautiful. A lack of money means fewer worries and power struggles. A few dedicated people can do a lot." This is demonstrated by *Climate Change: How Christians Respond*, a three-county conference for the Diocese in February 2005. An advert for this conference saw the first appearance of the environment on the home page of the Oxford Diocese.
www.sageoxford.org.uk

5. 'Greening the Meeting House': a project of the Dorking Quaker Meeting

'Greening the Meeting House' activities started in 2001 in response to the Quaker Call for Action (2001), and has yielded substantial environmental improvements to the building and its management, as part of the Quaker Living Witness consumption project.

After a slow start, the Management Group set up a working party, drawing heavily upon expert input from a Friend who was an environmentally-oriented heating engineer. With ethical investment with Triodos and the Portman Building Society already in place, the working party agreed to audit the current environmental footprint of the Meeting House in terms of:

- Energy supply, use and efficiency
- Heating, lighting and insulation
- Chemicals and cleaning materials
- Use of resources in day-to-day running of the Meeting House
- Reducing, reusing and recycling building materials, and investigating the use of recycled products
- Refreshments
- Garden and indoor plants.

The working group devised an action plan from the audit, estimating cost and environmental benefits. A first step was to switch to renewable electricity, and this had an additional effect as some Friends also switched their own domestic supply. Recycling points were established for items not handled by the local authority.

Funding for the various improvements was secured externally from SITA (waste management company landfill tax scheme) and internally through the Quaker faith, but relied heavily on voluntary effort by local people. Small, incremental achievements increased the momentum, and those involved report

that “if there are a few enthusiastic people prepared to do most of the work, the rest of the group are happy to go along with it. Most people are concerned about the environment but feel powerless to do anything.”

Dorking Quakers achieved the Eco-Congregation award in May 2003 and the Friends Meeting House now has a comprehensive environmental policy for all those hiring the building. Other Quaker Meetings have approached this project for advice, and information has been circulated via Churches Together in Dorking.

<http://www.quakergreenconcern.org.uk/>

6. ENHANCE: the Black Majority Churches Environmental Project pilot study

Two years after the start of the Eco-Congregation Project, it became clear that there was no involvement from the newer black majority churches. ENHANCE was a three year initiative in Handsworth and Lozells, Birmingham, run by ENCAMS and supported by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It targeted eight different denominations with varying sizes of congregation and links into the African, Caribbean and Asian communities.

Recruitment difficulties led to an 11 month delay in starting. First year work focused on building trust and developing ideas, and interested churches nominated social action co-ordinators who regularly met together and reported back at church services.

The Lozells Community Clean Up involved 70 people, 50 of whom came from local churches. They removed 180 bags of rubbish and cleaned graffiti, to the welcome relief of local residents, and the former project coordinator notes that “it inspired clean-ups in other areas and greater ‘ownership’ of sites – four out of five are still maintained. By

removing eyesores spirits were lifted and a sense of hope was restored to the area. The impact is unmeasurable but the effects are still tangible.” Featured on the local TV news, the action encouraged community groups to voice their concerns to Birmingham City Council that rubbish collection from poorer areas was less regular than in more affluent areas. Funding and other support was secured from B&Q, McDonalds, Whitbread Action Earth and local traders.

In addition to the Community Clean Up, ENHANCE delivered:

- Two church allotment projects in Handsworth, attracting a wide spread of ages and an equal number of men and women
- A community drop-in project in the New Testament Church of God, Lozells, offering advice and practical help to homeless and vulnerable people, with no overt ‘selling’ of the faith message
- A democracy day
- An educational trip for children
- An energy audit in the Church of God of Prophecy in Winson Green.

ENHANCE offers a number of useful lessons. Faith groups need help in translating environmental concepts into church language, in order to ‘sell’ the programme to busy leaders, who need others to act as day to day project champions. It takes a considerable amount of time and skill to allow project ideas to emerge from the priorities of the churches and local communities, and project champions may need information, training and at least a small budget to help this happen. Gaining the endorsement of local church leaders is essential, as is undertaking some form of ‘before and after’ research to help demonstrate the project’s impacts.

http://www.embrace.org.uk/pooled/profiles/BF_COMP/view.asp?Q=BF_COMP_8698

7. Environments for All in Leicester – working across faiths

The BTCV Environments for All programme has worked closely in Leicester with Gujarati Muslims, Gujarati Hindus, and Sikhs, whose common cultural bond and similar backgrounds crossed the religious divide. Members of the different faiths met with BTCV facilitation, and environmental discussions bore fruit in 2001 with the joint creation of a Rangoli garden. Another project created an urban oasis on the site of a demolished petrol station, putting an end to illicit activities and making the community safer.

BTCV were invited by the Brahma Samaj Community Centre to help organise events for the nine night Navaratri and Diwali celebrations. Approximately 50 young families and several local green groups joined in worship, religious dancing, and informal environmental awareness training. BTCV has also worked with community groups to celebrate the Islamic calendar date joint celebrations. These events are highly valued by families, who make new friends whilst learning about money-saving environmental practices such as recycling and energy and water efficiency. These events have enjoyed a diverse attendance, with hundreds of people of Somali origin, East African/Asian origin and European origin joining together during the month of Ramadan.

The Environments for All team feel that the best by-product of their work is the gradual erosion of entrenched negative values and beliefs. Environmental projects give people from all parts of the community a chance to get to understand each other whilst improving the local area, and they have made great strides towards eradicating racism, sexism, homophobia and Islamophobia.

Key lessons include:

- Well-established and effective routes of communication are vital. The most important ingredients of community outreach are identifying and utilising community 'gatekeepers', listening to community needs, not raising false expectations, getting away from assumptions, and respecting cultural and faith traditions
- Integration should be a two-way process with both sides learning about the other
- It is vital to keep up regular contact with groups, although without an established leader, it can be hard to relay the information to everyone
- Many projects need some sort of continuity approach to their work. Many participants need to see instant results and visible progress to keep them motivated
- It is vital that environmental projects understand their place in the perceived hierarchy of needs, and that they recognise that conservation volunteering is not a high priority next to poverty and other deprivation factors. <http://www.btcv.org/efa/about.html>

8. The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES)

IFEES is an internationally recognised organisation articulating the Islamic position on ecology and environmental sciences and their implementation. IFEES provides research, teaching materials, and practical and theoretical training. Suitable for a Muslim and non-Muslim audience alike, the slideshow 'Qur'an and Creation' outlines Islamic attitudes to the environment, and work is underway to develop an environmental handbook for imams.

IFEES hopes to establish educational camps and workshops to encourage environmental action, an international college for Islamic Environmental Studies in the UK, and an experimental centre focusing on land use, organic farming

and alternative technology development. To promote UK Muslim grassroots activities, IFEES has helped to set up the monthly London Islamic Network for the Environment (LINE), with the intention that it becomes self-sufficient.

Funding from appropriate sources and a lack of paid staff are constraining IFEES' ambitions. With no administrative support and "three very keen members who are doing most of the work", IFEES punches above its weight. It networks world-wide with NGOs, international organisations, academic bodies and grass-roots organisations, and helped draft a speech on Islam and the Environment for the UNEP conference in Cairo at which a Union of Arab Judges for the Environment was established.
<http://www.ifees.org/>

Part 3 Towards better practice

"The best and most powerful motivator for change is finding that another way of doing things, living or being, is more deeply satisfying than the old way... Guilt is not a good motivator for change...but a positive direct experience, and the personal satisfaction that flows from doing something new and different can be the most important catalyst for change." (Sim Van Ryn, 1992)

Insights from this informal audit

- The social and economic dimensions of sustainable development are currently a more natural 'fit' with faith groups than the environmental dimension, given that many faith groups face immediate challenges in the form of racism and poverty.
- Those involved in successful projects believe it is both possible and imperative to

demonstrate that implementing sustainable development is a way of practicing one's faith.

- The framing of sustainable development within faith tenets is not yet widespread in any UK faith group.

7. Priority areas for action

The seeds of faith engagement in the sustainable development agenda are spreading, and many of those featured in the case studies above, such as the SAGE group in Oxford, have experienced a quickening pace in recent years. But it takes more than a few dedicated individuals to create a lasting change in collective attitudes and behaviours, and the following are top line priority areas for action.:

Links

- Making the links between sustainable development and individual and collective faith practices

Language

- A lack of awareness and understanding of the term 'sustainable development' and its relevance to every day life is not unique to members of faith communities. Despite the natural links between the two approaches outlined in Section 3 (page 10), many of those leading the work featured above found it hard to engage their local faith groups at first, particularly on environmental projects. In some cases, as the Partners in Creation case study (see page 27) demonstrates, faith groups may feel they face more immediate issues such as racism and poverty, which are not seen as falling under the 'sustainable development' umbrella

Listening

- The sustainable development community has a clear role to play in engaging more deeply with faith communities to tease out the shared agenda and achieve the mutual benefits of working together. Policymakers and practitioners may have little direct experience of faiths outside their own (if they have one), and must be sensitive about and receptive to new values and ways of working. The case studies above show that the most successful projects happen when the sustainable development professional listens and responds to the needs of the local community, in a genuine dialogue. Both sides must be sensitive about, and ready to explain, their use of language.

Leadership for faiths around sustainable development

Individual behaviour can only go so far without national leadership, and in this regard, the strong lead from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the work undertaken within individual dioceses, notably in Manchester and Liverpool, have been significant. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, however, acknowledged that this needed strengthening in his July 2004 speech on the environment: "There is still a gap in speech and practice at the level of our institutions as a whole." Faith communities come together, weekly or more frequently, to pray, reflect, and discuss the fundamental issues of life, and if religious leaders were to use these events to provide a faith context for action on sustainable development, their influence would be extensive.

In addition to encouraging action among the faithful, faith leaders also have an institutional role to play as 'chief executives' of building, land and investment portfolios, and major purchasers of goods and services.

Continuing to implement sustainable development at this level is essential.

Faith-specific funding for sustainable development projects

In common with non-faith sustainable development voluntary projects, many of the case studies featured in this paper faced funding, staffing and capacity challenges. Accessing funding, even on a small scale, is often time-consuming, but for some faiths there are ethical objections to certain funding sources eg. the Lottery funds are the proceeds of gambling. Many funds operate an inclusivity policy that may make a single faith-based application less appropriate, and some faith groups report a sense that being tagged with the 'religious' label may also be a drawback.¹

Interfaith activity on sustainable development

Case studies contained in this paper (eg. Environments for All in Leicester) demonstrate how environmental projects break down barriers between faiths, foster a shared sense of community, and improve local well-being for everyone. This is one good argument for more interfaith activity on sustainable development. In addition, the combined voices and actions of the UK's major faiths will create deeper, faster change than a single faith could achieve on its own, and the sharing of

¹ Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund: A new fund launched on 22 September 2005 as part of the Government's 'Improving Opportunity and Strengthening Society' strategy. The fund will help faith communities promote understanding and dialogue. The Fund's two priorities are capacity building and inter faith activity.

The Fund is open for applications until 2 December 2005. Large and small grants will be available.

Details and grant forms can be accessed via Community Development Foundation website (<http://www.cdf.org.uk>)

effort and experience will reinforce existing links between faiths.

8. Next steps

Sustainable development policymakers and practitioners

- The sustainable development community can make more effort to understand the UK's major faiths, both in terms of religious beliefs and cultural practices, and creatively explore the contribution they could make to sustainable development
- This increased understanding could lead to the development of specific communications materials linking faiths' tenets to sustainable development principles and practices, and encouraging action
- Funders can better understand potential ethical objections to certain funding sources on the part of faith communities
- A specific funding pot for sustainable development faith-led projects may be explored.

Faith leaders and faith communities

- Faith leaders can raise the profile of environmental and social issues, framed within the tenets of their faith, and encourage local faith groups to take action. Climate change is arguably the most pressing issue to address, and sustainable consumption is one in which, with values that challenge consumerism, faith groups have a natural 'head start'
- Where individuals show enthusiasm, local faith leaders can actively encourage others to join in

- Faith leaders can implement sustainable development practices in the areas of 'corporate' building, land and investment portfolios and procurement
- Local faith communities can follow the examples highlighted in this publication, and begin their own projects, focusing on 'quick wins' to draw in other volunteers
- Successful projects can 'make more noise' to celebrate their achievements and encourage others to do the same
- Emerging interfaith relationships can be bolstered by practical action on sustainable development.

WWF and the SDC

- As the Government's official advisory body, the SDC will take a high level, strategic approach to raising the importance of faith groups in delivering sustainable development within key government departments, particularly the Home Office
- As a strictly 'apolitical' organisation, with recognised expertise across all aspects of sustainable development, WWF will continue to work with faith communities as part of its sustainable communities programme, and to disseminate good practice
- Both the SDC and WWF would welcome the convening of a new interfaith initiative, followed

by an action plan for implementation

- We welcome further contributions of case study material. There is a Faith in Action page on the SDC website.
www.sd-commission.org.uk

Further information from WWF is at
www.wwf.org.uk/localmatters

Appendix A References, quotations and websites

Referenced documents

(This does not include core texts such as the Bible, the Qu'ran, Agenda 21 etc.)

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- *'Call of Creation: God's invitation and the Human Response - The natural environment and Catholic Social Teaching'*. Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales. 2002.
- *'Earth and Faith: a book of reflection for action'* UNEP Interfaith partnership for the environment , 2000
- *'Environments for All'* BTCV, to be published early 2005
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- *'Faith makes communities work'* Shaftesbury Community Development Programme / DETR 1999
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- *'Bearing witness: a Zen master's lessons in making peace'* Glassman, Bell Tower Books 1998

- *'Do churches really want to save the planet?'* John Kennedy, CTBI, The Independent, 9 October 2004
- Duane Elgin's quotes on voluntary simplicity are from *'Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature mattered'* Parallax Press
- *"Marketing Values"* Dharmachari Vajraketu, Dharma Life 6 (1997): 25 (FWBO)
- Mike Monaghan (in *Priests and People: Justice for Creation*. Feb 2000 Vol 14 No 2 ISSN 00009-8736), quoted in John Ray Initiative – Review and Strategy 2004.
- *'Vocation for justice'* newsletter, Faith and Justice Team, Society of St Columban October 2004
- Worldwatch online debate, September 2004 at www.worldwatch.org

Websites

Ethical Investment sites

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/ethical/>

<http://www.ecology.co.uk/>

<http://www.triodos.co.uk/>

<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectId=48>

Projects and faith based organisations

A Rocha UK: <http://www.faithworks.info/Standard.asp?id=4243>

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers: <http://www.btcv.org/index.html>

The Catholic Church in England and Wales: www.catholic-ew.org.uk

Christian Ecology Link: www.christian-ecology.org.uk

Church of England: www.cofe.anglican.org/commissioners/asset.htm

The Community Development Foundation: www.cdf.org.uk

Community Environment Associates: www.suscom.org/cea

The Conservation Foundation: <http://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk/>

The Earth Charter Initiative: www.earthcharter.org

Ekklesia - UK think tank on theology and a news service: www.ekklesia.co.uk

ENCAMS/ENHANCE:

http://www.embrace.org.uk/pooled/profiles/BF_COMP/view.asp?Q=BF_COMP_8698

Environment City Leicester: www.environmentcity.org.uk/

European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN):

<http://www.ecen.org/ecenhome.shtml?sfgdata=4>

IFEES: <http://www.ifees.org/>

Imaad: http://www.imaad.org/contact_us.htm

John Ray Initiative: <http://www.jri.org.uk/>

Good Energy (previously Unit(e)): <http://www.good-energy.co.uk/>

Make Poverty History: www.MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY.org

One World Week – 23-30 October 2005: www.oneworldweek.org

PS...Buddhist eco-practice: www.ecopractice.fwbo.org

Quaker Green Action: www.quakergreenconcern.org.uk

Soka Gakkai International: <http://www.sgi-uk.org/>

<http://www.telcocitizens.org.uk/>

Tearfund : www.tearfund.org

Triodos Ethical Bank: www.triodos.co.uk

UNICEF: www.unicef.org.uk

Unit(e)(now Good Energy): <http://www.good-energy.co.uk/>

WWF-UK: www.wwf.org.uk

See also: www.wwf.org.uk/core/about/ta_0000001152.asp

(Manchester initiative)

www.yorkshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk/ylic_01.htm

Appendix B: Principles of sustainable development

In March 2005, the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations published *One future – different paths*, the UK's shared strategic framework for sustainable development. This was launched in conjunction with the UK Government's new strategy for sustainable development, *Securing the Future*.

A new framework goal sets out the purpose the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations are trying to achieve:

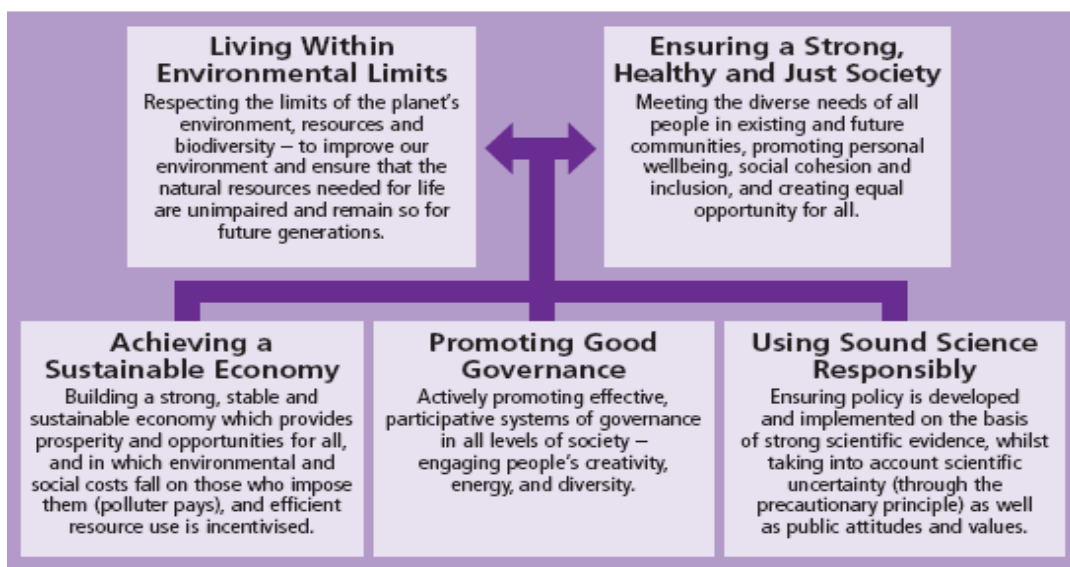
The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

For the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations, that goal will be pursued in an integrated way through a sustainable, innovative and productive economy that delivers high levels of employment; and a just society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal well-being. This will be done in ways that protect and enhance the physical and natural environment, and use resources and energy as efficiently as possible.

Government must promote a clear understanding of, and commitment to, sustainable development so that all people can contribute to the overall goal through their individual decisions.

Similar objectives will inform all our international endeavours, with the UK actively promoting multilateral and sustainable solutions to today's most pressing environmental, economic and social problems. There is a clear obligation on more prosperous nations both to put their own house in order, and to support other countries in the transition towards a more equitable and sustainable world.

A set of five shared principles underpin this purpose and the framework requires that a policy "must respect all five principles" to be considered sustainable:



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