

CHURCHES ARISE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

On a walk through the streets of Nigeria, your nose gets an overdose of dangerous gases emitted from refuse heaps, vehicle exhaust pipes and power generators. If you live in an oil-producing community, gas flares make a mess of your rivers, roofs, and crops. Cans, polythene bags and a multifarious cacophony of junk and garbage are littered in many places. The forests are becoming bereft of trees that should relieve the atmosphere of excess gases. As a result of these and other anthropogenic activities, global warming threatens human existence and climate change becomes a disaster.

It is against this background that the Christian Awareness Initiative of Nigeria (CHAIN) joined hands with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to hold a three-day workshop for Christian and opinion leaders on climate change. The British Council sponsored the event which had as its theme: “Communicating Climate Change to the Church” and held from the 17th to 19th of August 2010. Talks, video presentations, interactive and brainstorming sessions as well as exhibition of environment-friendly energy sources made the workshop a rewarding experience.

The CAN chairman, Rev. Samuel Kujiyat, declared the programme open by pointing out that our creator’s great interest in the environment was manifested when God mandated His first man to care for Eden’s garden as a first assignment. Rev. John Hayab, the CEO of CHAIN, stressed that a peaceful, joyous worship of God is impossible in a chaotic environment, and hence it was imperative for Christian leaders- whether youths, women or pastors - to study the problem of climate change and solutions proffered at the workshop with a view to making positive changes.

Debo Akande, Climate and Science Manager at the British Council articulated “Climate Change and You” to show how it affects each individual and how to combat the crisis. The reality of climate change in Northern Nigeria was x-rayed by Mallam Yahaya Ahmed who is CEO of the Developmental Association for Renewable Energies (DARE). The latter also exhibited alternatives to wood

fuel and hydro power – major contributors to global warming. A biblical perspective to the debate was discussed by Pastor James Movel, who condemned environmental abuses and demonstrated how such violate God’s laws.

Akande presented research evidence to show that only an infinitesimal percentage of Nigeria’s population understood climate change, while others believed it to be an inevitable punishment from God to “sinful” man. He explained that, though Nigeria does not contribute as much as more industrialized countries to global warming, the country was at serious risk to the bad side of climate change.

Climate, defined as the weather’s average state which is fairly stable and predictable, is known to change unpredictably due to increasing concentrations of atmospheric warming gases that stem from human activities such as gas flaring, improper disposal of non-degradable waste and emission of fumes. Atmospheric warming gases are also called greenhouse gases, divided into six categories: methane, nitrous oxide, hydro fluorocarbon and sulfur hexafluoride. Methane gets emitted from waste matter such as nylon or polythene wrappers when the sun acts on them, while carbon dioxide could come from human respiration.

Global warming, an increase in average temperature of the earth’s near surface, air and water bodies was said to be accelerated by deforestation, increased energy usage, pollution, unplanned urbanization and concentration of waste. The consequences of these include: rising sea levels that increase the risk of flooding; desertification which breeds drought and famine; as well as increased disease burden added to the extinction of species.

Specifically, Akande made it clear that the proliferation of power generators plus excessive use of vehicles and electric gadgets increase the global warming rate because greenhouse gases are emitted at the power generation point. Moreover, when trees are repeatedly felled for use as fuel, man becomes more at risk since such plants exist as natural absorbers of carbon dioxide.

The way out of this precarious situation was advanced to embrace massive tree-planting, use of renewable sources of energy (such as the sun and wind), creation of meteorological monitoring network in addition to reduction of plastics use. Participants were encouraged to take the bull by the horn and do what they can to solve these problems rather than pass the buck to governments.

Global warming needed a solution and Yahaya Ahmed of DARE had it ready made. He dared to introduce alternative sources of energy. Ahmed exhibited the “Save 80” stove and “Wonder box”, cooking inventions devised by his organization to stem the tide of global warming. The stove utilizes a handful of wood cuttings or tree branches. It leaves little room for heat and smoke to escape into the atmosphere, thus, heat is retained within the stove for cooking. The Wonder Box is used to cook via retained heat and keeps the contents at high temperature for many hours. There were also the solar oven, solar cooker and solar power panel. Quoting the National Geographic, Ahmed emphasized that the sun provides more than 6,000 times the total sum of our world’s daily electricity consumption. That makes it a reliable source of power generation.

Presenting the biblical perspective, Pastor James Movel pointed out that God commanded man (in Genesis 1: 26-28) to subdue the earth, not to abuse it. He disclosed also that human plunder of the earth through industrial and other activities is accelerating global warming as predicted in 11 Peter 3:10.

Giving the panacea, Pastor Movel admonished churches to clean their surroundings and embark upon a tree-planting drive. He kicked against the practice of throwing refuse in gutters or running water. The women were urged to use their intuitive brilliance and influence in the battle against global warming.

The brainstorming session on each day of the workshop was done in groups divided according to senatorial zones. Participants resolved to fight global warming and negative climate change by:

- Organizing step-down training, seminars and workshops.

- Community sanitation.
- Fund-raising to support efforts against global warming.
- Advocacy for policies and legislation.
- Evolution of ways to convert waste into money-making products.
- Use of energy-saving bulbs.
- Massive tree-planting.
- Construction of drainages.
- Identification of and collaboration with actors against global warming.

At the end of it all, CHAIN's in-house reporter had a chat with some participants and here's what they had to say:

This workshop has opened my eyes to the cause of our problems. In previous times, a particular tree signaled the coming of rainy season and commencement of planting in my community. We knew the rains were approaching when the tree blossomed and bore fruits. Now our climate has changed and the tree has become unreliable for that purpose. The rains no longer come when the tree fruits.

-Yohanna Elisha, farmer.

Having been enlightened on the dangers of global warming, I will do my best to stop activities that spoil our climate and cause global warming.

-Ifeoma Ezenechie, public servant.

Climate change cannot be stopped, but can be controlled. Let's join hands to make our environment better.

Haruna Michael, CAN.

