

East African church leaders respond to climate change locally, globally

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [November 26, 2014](#) issue

As the effects of climate change devastate communities in Kenya, church leaders are helping address the crisis locally while calling on industrialized nations to own up to their responsibilities for spewing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere.

“I think they [industrialized nations] are responsible for most of the emissions,” said Peter Solomon Gichira, the climate change program officer at the All Africa Conference of Churches. “They have responsibility to support climate change adaptation and mitigation as a moral obligation.”

“But we [in Africa] also have a role to play, because we have not been very good stewards of the environment,” added Gichira, a poverty and development expert.

People living in Global South nations such as Kenya are suffering the worst consequences, climate experts say. Droughts have become more severe and recurrent and are frequently followed by excessive rains or floods. Temperatures are much higher, and weather patterns are now unpredictable.

“We need enhanced adaptive capacity in partnership with the nations,” said Patrick Maina, a conservationist with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

Maina runs a tree planting project on church compounds and members’ farms in his presbytery in the Great Rift Valley area. He also gives talks on climate change.

Recently, Maina and other church leaders have stepped up efforts to help communities cope with the crisis.

In eastern Kenya, villagers are constructing structures known as sand dams with support from the Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and development organization. Working through local partners in the Utooni Development Organization, villagers in the largely Christian Utooni area are building large concrete walls across a dry riverbed, stopping or slowing down the rapid flow of rainwater to the Indian Ocean.

The simple structures—231 have been built since 2009—store water under the riverbed, so that it can be used for irrigation, tree planting, and domestic consumption throughout the year. With 50 sand dams constructed each year, the area is much cooler and better to live in, according to Esther Mbolu, a resident of Utooni.

Selena McCoy Carpenter of the Mennonite Central Committee said some people who did not have water access now do, and others who could not grow food are now able to farm.

On the slopes of Mount Kenya, Trade Craft East Africa, a nongovernmental organization, and the Christian Community Services of Mount Kenya East, a development agency in five Anglican dioceses, are helping small-scale farmers adapt to climate change through use of both modern and traditional weather forecasting methods.

Farmers predict weather by using indigenous practices such as watching flying dragonflies, low-swooping swallows, or flowering acacia trees.

But with weather patterns becoming unpredictable, farmers have been adding scientific forecasts delivered by meteorologists to determine when or what crops to plant.

“This is resulting in good harvest,” said Eston Njuki, a program officer at British-based Christian Aid, which funded the project with the Anglican Diocese of Mbeere. “The farmers are able to beat or reduce the threat of climate change.” —Religion News Service

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