

**Interfaith Forum on Climate Change for Sub-Saharan Africa**  
**Abuja, Nigeria, 8-9 February 2010**

This event was organised by the British Council, as a result of previous work which showed that there is a low understanding of the issues surrounding climate change in Nigeria, and in Africa as a whole, and that people often link climate change to faith in what is termed 'the God frame'. There might be either a fatalistic approach to climate change (i.e. God intended this; it is part of the Creator's plan), or some may uphold the view that the earth is entrusted to man, and humans are responsible for stewardship of the planet, under God's will.

Faith leaders can help mobilise action on climate change, through their extensive reach and their position of trust in local communities. This conference aimed to:

- Explore key messages of religious text and doctrine
- Mobilise followers to take action on climate change
- Encourage a sub-Saharan African joint interfaith declaration on climate change
- Encourage policy dialogue

**Summary of Events**

Over the course of the 2 days, there was a positive, motivated crowd, who attended the meeting already interested and engaged in the issue of Climate Change. This helped immensely in stimulating interesting and valuable discussion. Part of the reason for this success may have been the choice of location: in Nigeria, as in much of Africa, the effects of climate change are evident and on the doorstep of those in attendance at the conference. Thus, there was a sense of excitement and urgency in the discussions that took place. Discussion was rich, and valuable. Commitment to action was evident, and practical action points were discussed, with regard to policy and the potential of faith leaders. Finally, the Interfaith Declaration was signed, after various contributions and pledges were made in breakout groups.

**Key Points that Emerged from Discussions**

- Training of faith leaders is vital in tackling the challenge of climate change.
- Involving and including young people in the actions taken to reverse climate change is vital. Faith leaders should work with schools and parents to achieve this change.
- Faith leaders need to press urgently on politicians to achieve change: they must approach *them*, not wait for change to happen.
- Faith leaders must teach accurate messages of climate change, but must integrate this into their regular sermons, and into the language of their religious teachings, to which congregations and followers can engage. They must repeatedly spread their messages, and stay committed.
- Climate change messaging and information must be articulated in local languages that the local communities can relate to. Cultural nuances must be respected and culture used as a framework within which to frame the debate.
- On policy: tree planting was highlighted as a simple, effective means of helping prevent environmental damage. Trees that must be cut for firewood, should only be cut on their outer branches, leaving the trunk intact for further growth. Trees should be planted, involving the local

communities. Although they take time to grow, this is a cost-efficient method for, if nothing else, 'planting' the knowledge about climate change in people's minds, so that they might have an awareness, which can be built on.

- New technologies should be made use of in dealing with climate change. Faith leaders should be willing to adapt and take on innovative methods to teach climate change.
- Alternative means of engaging with communities must be explored. For example, theatre, radio and television, film, and other cultural forms.
- Mass media must be made use of.
- Places of worship should be exemplar models of 'green' spaces as far as possible.
- Greater attention to climate change needs to be given by all stakeholders – faith, secular, private sector, politicians, etc.
- Faith leaders should provide incentives for action on climate change in general, and in particular where there is a policy gap.
- Women need to be strongly involved in the climate change discussion – they must be actively engaged and approached. In Africa, they are the backbone of the economy, and are closer to their children, therefore a greater source of influence than men.
- Good practice must be shared.

The Declaration included the following action points:

- Capacity building for faith leaders, including undertaking training where possible
- Commitment to raising awareness of environmental ethics in religious activities, with at least one sermon a month for issues related to climate change
- Commitment to emphasising relevant verses in Holy Books
- Commitment to sharing best practices and strengthening existing structures and practices
- Commitment to working together with leaders of different faiths and to engage with government, private sector, educational institutions, youth, and civil society organisations. Where possible, policy makers should be held accountable.
- Commitment to working together to hold developed countries to account for a reduction of carbon emissions

### Conclusions

This event was highly interesting and stimulating. It encouraged action, both during the meeting itself, and afterwards. The gathering was positive, and forward looking. This is precisely the approach that is needed to tackle the global problem of climate change. The meeting was peaceful and respectful, encouraging mutual learning, with everyone contributing without fighting for their turn to speak, but with patience in listening to others. There was clear commitment on all fronts, and across faiths. There was a strong interfaith focus, with all in attendance signing the declaration.