THE ROLE AND STRATEGIES OF CHURCHES IN ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN GHANA

DELIVERED BY

MR. CHARLES AGBOKLU

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- **Introduction**

The Problem of Climate Change has become very topical globally because of its importance as a life sustaining or devastating issue.

- **Definition:**

Scientific: - Change In weather patterns observed over a long period of time [30 years or more] that relates to temperature, wind and rainfall etc.

- ***Other Perspectives***

Social: - CC is the Greatest Developmental Challenge of the 21st Century – Development Experts.

Ethical: " A Civilisation Challenging Ethical and Moral Problem, with Enormous Practical Significance for Policy" —Prof Donald Brown.

Climate Change is attributed to **Global Warming** that is caused by the **"Emission of Green House Gases" [carbon dioxide + others]** that are churned out by heavy industries and through agricultural production.

- **Manifestations**

Very high and humid temperatures, excessive floods, severe and prolonged droughts, soil erosion, erratic rainfall, melting polar ice, rising sea levels, ferocious cyclones and typhoons etc.

- **Effects**

Coastal erosion, crop failures, water stress, storm surges, migration etc. all these have serious implications for food and nutrition security, energy security, livelihoods, health and education.

- **Obligation**
- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) obliges all countries to take specific steps to reduce the emission of Green House Gases [GHG] under the Kyoto Protocol. The Developed Countries have however, reneged on their obligations.

- They want to decide on their own, when, how and by what quantum they were ready to shed GHG emissions though they had agreed, when they became parties to the Convention to reduce targets required of them based upon **"EQUITY",** to prevent dangerous and irreversible climate change.

- **Warning**

In recent times however, two (2) important reports have jolted the World from slumber. The **IPCC 5th Assessment Report [Working Group 1] and the UNEP Report on Closing the Emission Gap** make it clear that

  - Time was running out for the world;
  - We are approaching the "tipping point" where dangerous climate change cannot be reversed.
  - The world MUST ACT NOW if we are to avoid the catastrophe that lies ahead, by immediately adopting a much more ambitious global approach to climate change than current national commitments provide.

- **Ghana**

Ghana loses 3 metres of coastline annually to sea erosion, while the Northern Regions are of late registering near desert daytime temperatures.

Most maize farms in the Volta and Greater Accra Regions that were cropped in the minor season last year failed due to a prolonged drought. Studies have shown that if this trend continues Cocoa could no longer grow in Ghana by 2050. These are but some tangible effects that are obvious in Ghana.

- **Dimensions**

Several dimensions of Climate Change continue to emerge. Climate Change and Human Rights; Gender; Migration [Climate Refugees]; Health, Ethics and Morality and many others.

As Churches or Religious Bodies, the **Ethical and Moral** concerns of climate change should engage our utmost attention.

- **Ethical and Moral Concerns**

The Ethical and Moral concerns of Climate Change have emerged strongly from Ethicists who argue that Climate Change is no longer an economic or political concern but a **MORAL ISSUE** which calls for equity, distributive justice and morality.

- **Faith Bodies**

This angle of the discourse is being strongly advocated for by **FAITH BODIES** led by the World Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches and some academic scholars.

They argue that it is ethically unacceptable, that developed countries obliged to cut emissions and roll back the effects of Climate Change want to do so only by considering their national economic interests without regard to the **REALITY** that their actions affect others globally.

These countries are obliged ethically not to cause harm to others through their actions or inactions.

Public Policy on Climate Change must not be based upon economic self-interest, but rather on **Responsibilities** to those who are most harmed by inaction.

- **Global & Continental Initiatives**

  World Council of Churches. [W.C.C]
  - Launched Care for Creation and Climate Justice Campaign in the last 20 years.
  - Organising an Interfaith Summit on Climate Change from 21st – 22nd Sept ahead of the UN Summit.
- Global Survey on Ecotheology, Climate Justice and Food Security in Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development to map the current situation of training, teaching and research on ETCF in theological education, ecumenical formation and Christian leadership development.

- **All Africa Conference of Churches [AACC]**
  - Capacity Building of Africa Clergymen on Climate Change and Food Security – May, 2014.

- **Religious Bodies Network on Climate Change (GHANA)**
  - An Inter- Faith Platform devoted to work in the areas of climate change and sustainable development formed in 2010 with the EPC as the lead organization.

- **ROLE OF CHURCHES IN GHANA**

What should Churches or Religious Bodies Do?

Advocacy, Education and Awareness Creation are potent tools of Religious Bodies for which they are very well noted for, therefore, we need to:

- Engage Policy Makers
- Provide Information, Education and Communication (IE&C) on Climate Change Issues to The Public.
- Strengthen Organisational Capacity.
- Mobilize Funds for Programme Implementation
- Promote Mutual Understanding, Respect, Tolerance and Trust Among Member Organisations.
- Undertake Projects in Afforestation, Renewable Energy etc.

- **STRATEGIES**

1. Establish a dedicated Platform on CC [Preferably an Inter Faith One] to galvanize a common and **BIG VOICE** for engaging Policy Makers and Implementers Regularly.

2. Organize Workshops and Training Seminars on CC for Religious Leaders and Members [FBO's] at all levels.

3. **SPEAK OUT!**
   a) Advocacy Campaigns for Good Climate Policy, Laws and Regulations. Participate in National Policy Consultation Processes and Validation Forums.
   b) Represent the Voiceless in National Debates. [Radio and Television Talk Shows]

4. Publish Factsheets, Flyers, Banners, Policy Briefs, Discussion Papers, Press Releases and Statements on critical Climate Change issues. Use the Internet, Websites, email and Social Media platforms, e.g. Facebook; Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, etc.;

5. Train Staff in specialized fields — Financial Management, Proposal Writing and Reporting Standards. Involve staff in Climate Change Workshops and Seminars;

6. Encourage Partnerships with Overseas and Continental Congregations to engage and share experiences on CC and Environmental issues.

7. Form Eco – Congregations and Eco Clubs in Basic Schools and Integrate CC and Environment lessons in school and theological school curricula. e.g. KOEE in Kenya

8. Engage the National Development Planning Commission over the national Budget Planning Process.

9. Undertake fund raising activities internally and externally to support activities

10. Exchange visits among FAITH BODIES to learn and share experiences.

11. Exchange of Pulpits among Partners

THE END

Presented by

MR. CHARLES AGBOKLU
NATIONAL COORDINATOR
RELIGIOUS BODIES NETWORK ON CLIMATE CHANGE
GHANA

References:

www.ethicsandclimate.org

www.oikoumene.org

www.wcc-coe.org

www.aacc-ceta.org

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Appendix

ROLE	STRATEGY
ENGAGE POLICY MAKERS AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTERS REGULARLY TO POSITIVELY INFLUENCE POLICIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE	Establish a dedicated Platform on CC [Preferably an Inter Faith One] to galvanize a very BIG VOICE and position YOU for useful engagements with targeted institutions. E.g. Parliament, NDPC, MESTI.
PROVIDE INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION (IE&C) ON CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES TO THE PUBLIC.	Organize Workshops and Training Seminars on CC for Religious Leaders and Members [FBO's] at all levels to understand and appreciate the problems of CC. Create Awareness in citizens across all levels. Publish Factsheets, Flyers, Banners, Policy Briefs, Discussion Papers, Press Releases and Statements on critical Climate Change issues. Use the Internet, Websites, email and Social Media platforms, e.g. Facebook; Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, etc.;
STRENGTHEN ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY THROUGH THE BUILDING OF ADEQUATE AND EFFICIENT HUMAN RESOURCE BASE.	Train Staff in Financial Management, Proposal Writing and Reporting Standards. Involve staff in CC Workshops and Seminars.

ROLE	STRATEGY
MOBILIZE FUNDS FOR PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION	Undertake Fund Raising Activities internally and Externally
UNDERTAKE AFFORESTATION / REFORESTATION ACTIVITIES	Establish Eco – Clubs Establish Tree Nurseries Establish Community Woodlots Undertake Massive Tree Planting Activities Train rural farmers in Community – Based Adaptation Techniques [Climate Info, New Crop Varieties etc].
PROMOTE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, RESPECT, TOLERANCE AND TRUST AMONG MEMBER ORGANISATIONS	Undertake institutional visits; exchange of Pulpits; respect each other's sacred literature. Encourage Partnerships with Overseas and Continental Congregations to engage and share experiences on CC and Environmental issues.
UNDERTAKE AFFORESTATION / REFORESTATION ACTIVITIES	Establish Eco – Clubs Establish Tree Nurseries Establish Community Woodlots Undertake Massive Tree Planting Activities Train rural farmers in Community – Based Adaptation Techniques [Climate Info, New Crop Varieties etc].