News
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A young boy, sitting in a tree to get a view, joins about 1,000 other protesters to demand action on climate change, in a park Sept. 20, 2019, in downtown Nairobi, Kenya. The Diocese of Murang'a and Equity Bank have partnered to restore degraded forests in central Kenya. (AP photo/Ben Curtis)

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As effects of climate change continue mounting across the horn of Africa, governments, nongovernmental organizations and individuals are collaborating to save the planet and brighten the future. Among them are the Catholic Church and Equity Bank, who have partnered to restore degraded forests in central Kenya.

The Diocese of Murang'a has teamed up with the largest bank in East Africa to increase forest cover as the country prepares to plant 15 billion trees in the next 10 years, part of newly elected President William Ruto's "ambitious pledge to ramp up clean energy and phase out fossil fuels for electricity by 2030," reported AP.

According to Kenya News Agency, the diocese will receive seedlings from Equity Bank. Parishioners and community members will plant them in diocesan compounds and at institutions like schools and hospitals, under the supervision of Kenya Forest Service.

"The church is ready to collaborate with other organizations in conserving the environment. It is our responsibility as Christians to protect nature," said Bishop James Wainaina of the Murang'a Diocese in a statement, adding that "such collaboration is a win-win."

Equity Bank was founded in 1984 as Equity Building Society, with the aim of uplifting low-income earners to own houses. The bank introduced the Africa Recovery and Resilience Plan to focus on many things, including environmental conservation, which Equity Group managing director and CEO James Mwangi said will be given first priority by ensuring that African nations adopt cleaner energy, particularly in countries where the bank has a presence.



Bishop James Wainaina of Murang'a, Kenya, captures images on his tablet during a break at an event marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops in the Paul VI hall Oct. 17, 2015, at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Wainaina lauded the collaboration between the bank and the diocese, saying it will significantly contribute to conserving the environment which in the recent past has been degraded by logging. He added that with the high population of Catholics in the country, the church can be an effective institution to reinstate the degraded forests.

According to the 2019 census, Catholicism boasts almost 10 million followers in Kenya and the Catholic Church runs several schools, hospitals and colleges in the region, including the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi.

During a tree-planting exercise on land owned by the Murang'a Diocese, Wainaina vowed to mobilize Catholics across the country and beyond to protect nature.

"We shall include everybody in this move across the country as a way of appreciating nature and showing love to our almighty creatures," he told EarthBeat.

According to Kenya News Agency, "The bank has donated to the church more than 10,000 seedlings to plant in parcels of land owned by the diocese."

According to Mwangi, the bank in partnership with other organizations, like churches, has successfully planted about 21.1 million trees out of its target of 35 million seedlings.

Each million seedlings represent a year that the bank has been operating in Kenya. The CEO said in a statement that it's high time that corporations should not just think of profits but also of nature which is part of their lives and their businesses.

A tweet from Equity Bank Kenya shows Catholic religious planting trees in July 2021 at Holy Family Catholic Church Utawala in Nairobi. The bank, working with groups like the church, is working to plant 35 million trees.

"Corporates should not only target high profits and forget other important things like environmental conservation. That also implies keeping away from projects that hurt the environment and contribute to climate change," said Mwangi.

During a tree-planting exercise at Pangani Girls High School in Nairobi, Kenya, last November, he called upon corporations to start thinking deeply about climate change and take actions to improve the situations that continue deteriorating each day.

Mwangi said the bank is committed to achieving a negative carbon footprint by the year 2030 through their partners and customers. Currently with more than 16 million customers, the bank can influence a large population on conservation matters.

Equity Bank also provides loans to help homeowners in the region transition to clean energy, to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and help mitigate the effects of climate change.

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"The bank also created the world's first energy loan dubbed Eco-Moto Loan available digitally via mobile network, Equitel," reported HapaKenya. According to a statement from the bank, "To date over 100,000 clean energy products has been financed and distributed, benefitting over 300,000 individuals."

The partnership with the diocese also targets institutions like schools and colleges to shift from relying on firewood and charcoal to liquified petroleum gas energy sources to help save about a billion trees per year from being felled for firewood.

As part of efforts to mitigate climate change, the Kenyan government plans to introduce a Certificate of Green Conduct to be awarded to individuals who participate in tree planting exercises.

"We will award Kenyans who are participating in the effort to green our country with a certificate of green conduct. The government will attach high value to the document and it will be a requisite document for one to access government services and even jobs in this country," said Soipan Tuya, cabinet secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, during a tree-planting exercise at Karura Forest.

Environment degradation imperils Kenya's Subukia Shrine and healing waters

"We're ready to work with groups that come forward for partnership. We can only mitigate against climate change by planting trees and fruit trees," Murang'a assistant chief conservator Jerome Mwanzia told EarthBeat.

Mwanzia said one way to protect trees that are being grown from being felled for firewood is to plant fruit trees from which farmers can get cash for selling the fruits.

"If we don't empower farmers with fruit trees they will cut trees to get money to sustain themselves, so as we plant these trees let us also consider fruit trees," he said.

The conservator applauded another bank involved in tree-planting efforts, Africa Development Bank, during a tree-planting exercise in Murang'a in which the bank prioritized planting fruit trees and distributing seedlings to farmers.

According to an Africa Development Bank Group report, Africa has remained the most vulnerable continent to climate change impacts, "despite its low contribution to greenhouse gas emissions." Extreme weather like drought and flooding has become common in the region.

According to the United Nations, Africa has contributed an estimated 2–3% of global greenhouse gas emissions, a very small percent compared to countries like China (27%) and the United States (11%).

As climate vulnerabilities increase in African countries, rich nations have failed to keep their promises of $100 billion a year to developing nations to help them achieve their climate goals.

Ahead of COP27, the U.N. climate change conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from Nov. 6–18 last year, Africa Development Bank president Akinwumi Adesina said, "We should move away from megawatts of talk, which is delivering zero financing for climate adaptation, to actually put in the money on the table to support African countries to adapt to climate change."