



Members of the Laudato Si' Kenya chapter clean up Nairobi National Park.
(RNS/Fredrick Nzwili)

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Across East Africa, young Catholics are transforming Pope Francis' call to care for creation into climate education and advocacy, arguing that protecting the environment is as much a religious obligation as attending church.

At St. Ignatius Parish — a young congregation in the Kenyan Catholic diocese of Ngong — 25-year-old Brian Chacha is often urging people to roll up their sleeves for tree planting and environmental clean up.

"The goal is to remind people that caring for creation is not a one-day event but an expression of our faith and a year-round commitment," Chacha said.

As part of the Kenya chapter of the Catholic climate movement, Laudato Si', Chacha leads community discussions about everything from the importance of recycling to clean energy. Other times, he helps the group organize clean ups and tree planting events using social media.

"Tree cover helps reduce the impacts of climate change," he said. "It also restores biodiversity, improves air quality and conserves water catchment areas."

Laudato Si' is a global movement of over 900 Catholic organizations and over 10,000 trained leaders known as animators. It is inspired by Francis' second encyclical issued in 2015, "*Laudato Si'* (Praise Be to You)", which addresses the global environmental crisis, consumerism and climate change. Active chapters are growing in most African countries with Catholic populations, including Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Uganda, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia and Ethiopia, according to the organization.

From July 19-26, over 100 bishops from nine countries in the [Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa](#), a regional Catholic pastoral organization, met in Nairobi for a plenary meeting focused on hearing concerns from young people, including their concerns about climate change impacts and how the church should respond.

East Africa has one of the world's youngest populations with 80% of the population below age 35. Many of them have experienced the extreme consequences of climate change, as droughts and floods alternate decimating food crops and snuffing out animal pasture, pushing millions of people in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan into extreme hunger.

"The youth are knowledgeable; they have a keen awareness of what is happening," said Bishop Peter Kimani Ndung'u of the Diocese of Embu and vice chair of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops' Commission for Youth at the AMECEA media briefing.

"At the same time, we also see their fears, the worries and the doubts about themselves, the uncertainties about the future, eroding trust in institutions such as governments and the church," he added. "They have spoken. As bishops, we have listened to them."

The bishops committed to four years of prioritizing youth involvement in the church.

Pope Leo XIV has continued and reinforced Francis' Laudato Si' legacy, [saying](#) at the tenth World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation last year that environmental justice is a "duty born of faith."

Now bishops and priests in East Africa speak more about caring for "mother earth" as part of God's given responsibility. It is normal to hear climate change challenges being spoken about at gatherings of church leaders and interfaith events. Often, youth are leading.

Regina Magoke, a 25-year-old climate justice advocate from St. Ambrose Tagaste parish in the Tanzanian Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, recently founded [Green Sphere Initiative](#) to empower young people and communities on environmental care. Through her Green Earth for Sustainable Future Campaign, launched in 2024, she has led the planting of over 5,000 trees in schools each year.

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"I also work with faith communities to promote climate justice and ethical investment, encouraging 'care for our common home' as both a moral and Christian responsibility," Magoke said.

She also joins beach clean-up campaigns which aim at reducing plastic pollution along the coastline and protecting marine ecosystems.

"For me, every tree planted and every shoreline cleaned is an act of hope, faith in action and a commitment to caring for our common home," she said.

The work against climate change — including climate and ecological justice — cannot be advanced without the voices and creativity of young people, said Ashley Kitisya, the director for Africa at the Laudato Si' movement.

"Youth bring urgency, digital organizing skills and a willingness to ask difficult questions about fossil fuels, greenwashing and the future they will inherit," Kitisya said. "We have seen that wherever youth are genuinely involved, given space to speak, organize and lead, the conversation shifts from general concern to specific changes on the ground."

Kitisya said in places where young people have been part of parish and diocesan discernment, there have been concrete results: local campaigns against pollution, new interest in renewable energy and stronger pressure on leaders to examine how church investments align with care for creation.

At the plenary meeting, Laudato Si' urged bishops in Eastern Africa to prioritize ethical investment, greater participation in its movement and stronger transparency in church financial stewardship. It also called for young people to play a more active role in church leadership while supporting youth-led initiatives in environmental stewardship and renewable energy.

Allen Ottaro, a founding executive of the [Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa](#), said Africa's youthful population was well-educated, tech-savvy and concerned about issues of social justice. He said the church was in a unique position to form them.

"Forming a generation ... that has a good relationship with our ecosystems and is conscious of its ecological footprint is a key response of the church and can have tremendous results in creating a just and inclusive society where ecosystems thrive," he said. "This is why it is critical for the church to (be) closely accompany young people in the vocation of care for our common home."

Like Chacha, Hayat Abdi Tijane, a 25-year-old Ethiopian environmental advocate and former Global Climate Change Foundation ambassador, promotes environmental stewardship and awareness campaigns. She organizes tree planting and community greening initiatives in her Mary Help of Christians parish within the Catholic [Archeparchy of Addis Ababa](#).

Her focus is on the health impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities.

"As a public health professional, I view climate change as both an environmental and health challenge that requires collective action from faith communities, governments and civil society," said Tijane.

Tijane said local awareness of climate change is improving in her region. She cites an urban greening and environmental improvements initiative in Ethiopia, known as the Corridor Development Programme, as one example that has helped increase public awareness about environmental protection. But she warned that there was still a significant knowledge gap.

"Many people still do not fully understand the causes and impacts of climate change or the benefits of climate action," she said.

According to Chacha, sustaining long-term community engagement, limited financial resources and inadequate access to environmental education are some of the challenges he faces. Laudato Si' offers support through activities such as training and advocacy, but funding comes from the parishes and organizations independently, often providing only small resources like lunch for volunteers.

"While many people are enthusiastic during tree planting events, maintaining the trees requires continued commitment and resources," Chacha said. "The growing impacts of climate change itself, including prolonged droughts that reduce the survival of trees, are a key drawback."

Pius Oko, the regional program manager of GreenFaith Africa, an international, multi-faith climate and environmental movement, said climate change is simultaneously a scientific, economic, social, moral and ultimately, generational, question.

"Young Africans will live longest with the consequences of today's energy and development choices, but they can also become the generation that accelerates a different pathway — one based on renewable energy, decent green livelihoods,

social protection, ecological stewardship and justice," Oke said.