



Climate- and environment strategy



2025

Introduction

CKU is an umbrella organization that represents 35 churches and church-based organizations with 120 partners from around 45 different countries in the Global South. The members and partners vary in size and organizational setup. Some are nationwide churches with a hierarchical structure throughout the country, such as the Lutheran Church. Others are network-based churches, such as the Pentecostal church. The diversity in churches and church-based organizations highlights a significant need for a broad and knowledge-based range of working approaches.

Regardless of size and organizational setup, religious narratives shape the ideological reason for churches and church-based organizations to engage – or refrain from engaging in climate change and environmental degradation. A review conducted by Nordic Consulting Group in 2023 on CKU's work with climate adaptation and religious actors, concluded that:

“There is a huge unused potential among churches and church-based development organizations of the partner organizations to integrate creation care into their constitution and systematically draw on identity and faith as the motivation for sustainable climate action. Thus, personal identity and faith become the motivation for people to change towards a more environmentally friendly living and climate action. This change of identity draws on inner motivation with a potential of long-lasting behavior change”. [Link to Climate Review](#),

The NCG 2023 review identified a spectrum of religious narratives within the Christian tradition that lead to differing outlooks concerning the natural environment. The spectrum can be segmented into four main narratives:

The first narrative emphasizes salvation brought to sinners, the afterlife and the new world to come as central. This narrative considers environmental and climate concerns as secular matters beyond the church's purview.

The second narrative attends to human-nature relations and the role of humans as stewards of God's creation. This tradition underpins the engagement of many churches and religious engagement in creation care, recognizing that God placed humans in a position of responsibility over the creation.

The third narrative is concerned with social justice and the mandate of the church to protect the poor and the most vulnerable. This narrative ties together social justice and climate change, addressing the basic injustice that the world's poorest populations contribute the least to the climate crisis, yet they are most affected by climate change.

The fourth narrative regards connectedness between human and nature implying that Jesus Christ came to save the whole creation, including eco-systems, not only humans. This narrative views human beings as embedded into the web of life and an interconnectedness with nature where humans live in balance with nature.

Faith and religion as an important factor in environmental engagement and action is not limited to the Christian belief or church and church-based organizations.

CKU recognizes that religious actors from diverse beliefs are key stakeholders in bringing about sustainable change. It is therefore important to consider the context and ensure representativity of majority and minority beliefs when involving religious actors as change agents. It is important to notice that religious actors can also counteract adaptation and cause maladaptation.

CKU has identified five principles that are often seen in religious actors, that act as positive changemakers:

1. Religious actors recognize themselves as part of civil society.
2. Religious actors align with the international human rights framework.
3. Religious actors are guided by core religious principles and draw on an inner motivation.
4. Religious actors play to their strengths using their platform, voice and space to promote messages.
5. They make their faith spaces into spaces for civic engagement¹.

Key principles in working with climate change adaptation

Support to climate change adaptation is financed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wherefore the Danish Law on International Development, the Danish Strategy for Development Cooperation, and the CKU administrative guidelines sets the frame for the support for climate change adaptation along with the governments' strategy 'A Green and Sustainable world (2020). CKU also recognizes the Paris Agreement, The United Nations Framework Convention on climate change, The United Nations pact for the Future, The Convention on Biological diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development goals as key documents that constitute the methodological framework, when working with climate adaptation.

Local leadership

Climate change impacts are highly localized, as they are dependent on the interplay of changing climatic, environmental, and socio-economic conditions on the ground. It is therefore essential that adaptation interventions are tailored to local contexts, are locally relevant, and respond to local needs. Climate change adaptation must be localized, locally led and empowering. Interventions must be based on local solutions to local development problems. Interventions must underpin local leadership and devolve decision-making at the lowest level possible and build on ownership.

Locally led adaptation ensures that funding directly reaches communities most affected by climate change. Sub-national actors are often best situated to formulate and implement adaptation interventions addressing such localized factors². Local churches, FBO's and religious actors are often uniquely positioned to enable context relevant solutions and responses tailored to local conditions. Religious institutions are deeply embedded in the local societies and therefore have unique access to communities at local level. Evidence shows that localization of climate change adaptation leads to more just solutions because of the proximity of those most affected and least heard. They deliver more integrated, context specific, democratic, and accountable solutions for the poorest and most excluded people³.



Target Groups and Intersectional Impacts

Poor persons and vulnerable groups are often most affected by the consequences of climate change. The climate crisis undermines poor and vulnerable groups' access to basic rights such as the right to life, security, food, water, housing, health, protection, education, environment, and culture. Climate change and environmental degradation affects many aspects of people's lives in the global south and exacerbates the vulnerability of vulnerable groups. It is well-established that climate change disproportionately affects marginalized groups, particularly those living below the poverty line. Other vulnerable groups are children, women and persons with disability as well as ethnic and religious minorities. These groups often have limited knowledge of climate change and limited resources to adapt to climate change. Moreover, vulnerable groups often have limited access to decision-making processes regarding climate change adaptation in their context.

Vulnerability is:

The combination of the sensitivity of people and natural systems to adverse socio-economic and environmental effects of climate change and the ability to cope with them.

When working with climate change it is therefore important to identify and include the most vulnerable groups and improve their adaptive capacity. CKU recognizes the importance of leaving no one behind and include vulnerable groups such as women, children, persons with disability, religious and ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ persons. At the same time, it is important to assess the multidimensional intersecting consequences of climate change.

Rights-based approach

All interventions addressing climate change and environmental degradation must aim to eradicate poverty. Interventions must be based on a rights-based approach (RBA) and thus promote and protect human rights as well as empowering right-holders to hold duty-bearers accountable. Learn more on how to work from a rights-based approach here: [CKU's RBA position paper](#).

Empowerment is at the core of RBA. This includes capacity building of civil society, enabling poor and vulnerable persons to participate meaningfully in their development and ensuring inclusion as well as involvement in decision-making processes.

Advocacy is also essential when working with climate and environment. Through advocacy, civil society actors address the root causes to problems and influence duty bearers. Civil society actors may advocate for allocation of budget for local climate adaptation, strengthened natural resources governance, just distribution, and access to resources such as water. A strong and organized civil society is a prerequisite for advocacy. Building and supporting civil society in self-help groups and federations strengthens their ability to voice issues and bring about change. Linking the civil society groups with networks and coalitions further enhances civil societies' ability to influence an agenda. At local-level religious actors and CSO's can address local challenges, but often there is a need to advocate at higher levels (regional or national) when advocating for governance, finance or justice. Globally church-based organizations can link up with international faith-based organizations such as LWF, WCC, WEA, Micah, and others to voice and articulate relevant issues that call for global attention or action.



Food security in Rwanda

The Baptist church in Denmark has in partnership with the partner AEBR (Association Des Eglises Baptistes au Rwanda) advocated for more sustainable agricultural practices that consider environmental protection and restoration among rural communities in Rwanda. The project has modelled the effect of implementing conservation agriculture for 5.338 community members. Conservation agriculture considers both soil restoration, organic fertilization and agroforestry which benefit the eco-system that the farmers depend on. Conservation agriculture also has positive implications for the crops and the produce. This was modelled through a local competition where the project won best crop results. The project has expanded conservation agriculture through 10 local churches and modelled how the method strengthened the resilience of local farmers toward climate change. Consequently, the District office for agriculture has decided to adopt conservation agriculture in their work and expand it through their employed extension workers. The recognition of the government of conservation agriculture reinforces the long-lasting effect of the project.

Multistakeholder approach

Effective climate action requires collaboration across sectors through multistakeholder partnerships. This may involve partnerships with government, governmental sectors, private companies, academia, and civil society to implement sustainable solutions that address climate adaptation, resource management, and disaster preparedness. Challenges related to water, sanitation, irrigation, green energy or warning

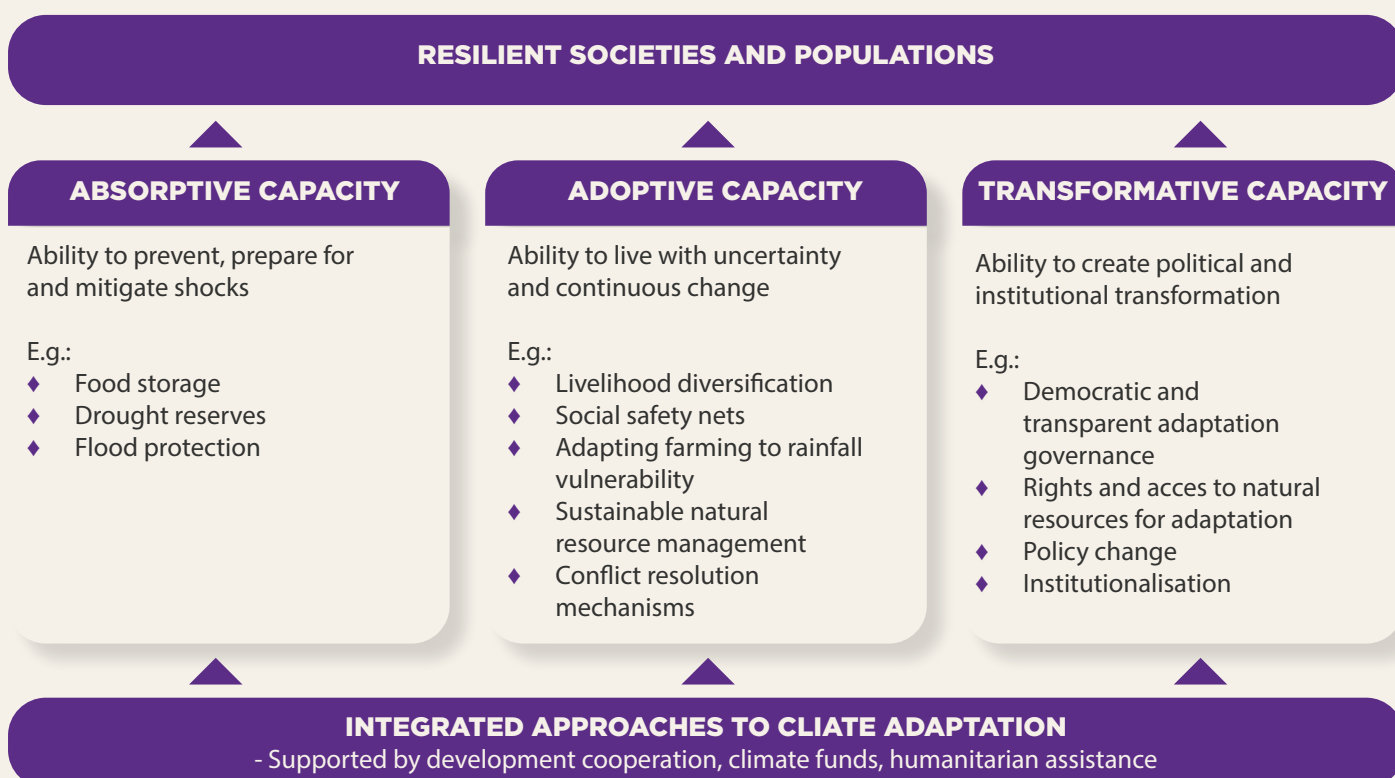
systems may require sector relevant cooperation with private companies that provide specialized solutions such as boreholes, solar energy, irrigation systems and alarm systems. Cross-cutting sector collaboration is therefore important to foster innovative and technological climate solutions in the global south.

Thematic perspectives

Climate change and environmental degradation are complex and cover a wide range of challenges to be addressed. You can read more below about four subjects: climate change adaptation, natural resource governance, disaster risk reduction, and climate and conflict. All interventions must be rooted in the context and respond to local needs in an inclusive manner.

Climate change adaptation

Climate change adaptation is a key component in the achievement of resilient societies. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines resilience as the ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-organization and the capacity to adapt to stress and change (IPCC AR4, 2007). Adaptation is defined as the ability of a system to adjust to climate change (including climate variability and extremes), to moderate potential damages, to take advantages of opportunities, or to cope with the consequences. The figure⁴ below shows how support for climate change adaptation can contribute to achieving resilience:



Support for climate change adaptation therefore requires a broad-based approach that works with prevention, adaptation and transformation, including building socioeconomic and institutional foundations for resilience.

To integrate adaptation into projects, it is critical that the project is based on a clear analysis and identification of the climate risks and vulnerabilities that the project will help address. Incorporating climate risk and vulnerability assessments into development planning is essential for responding to local needs. The tool informs the identification of actions needed to increase community resilience. The process involves collection of information through secondary research, as well as participatory tools that include local knowledge. By combining and analyzing data using a set of guiding questions, we can identify the key issues that determine people's vulnerability to climate change, as well as their existing resilience capacities.

Drought and climate adaptation in Malawi

In Malawi, the Salvation Army works with climate adaptation through climate SMART agriculture from a faith-based approach called Foundational farming. Malawi suffers under severe drought meanwhile more than 80 % rely on farming. Through climate SMART agriculture, local farmers cope better with the drought. Soil quality improves through mulching, agroforestry, rotational- and inter-cropping as well as organic fertilizer. Trees and coverage of the soil reduces soil temperature and prevents the burning of the seeds. In case of floods the trees prevent soil erosion. Diversification of crops has given community members more income and nutrition sources and made the farmers more food secure. As a church the Salvation Army has mobilized local communities to adopt new climate smart techniques.

Natural resources governance

Exhaustion of natural resources in the global South also exposes a threat to the livelihoods of people living there. According to the Sustainable Development Goal 15: Life on land, it is important to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss. SDG 15,1 states the importance of ending deforestation and restore degraded forests, and SDG 15,3 states the importance of ending land desertification and restoration of degraded land by combatting desertification and restore degraded land and soil.

Context-specific strategies such as improved natural resource governance and sustainable

practices can protect and restore local environments. Sustainable practices could be linked to farming, soil management, cooking stoves, rotational grazing system in rangeland use and afforestation.

Faith actors and churches can play a critical role in ecosystem restoration by mobilizing their communities and leveraging their influence to promote sustainable practices through messages of stewardship. Locally faith actors can use their moral authority to advocate for the promotion of energy saving cooking stoves that require less firewood at household level. At higher levels religious leaders can use their platform to advocate for sustainable, transparent, and accountable use of natural resources including advocacy for improved and just natural resource governance, where a political framework promotes protection of natural resources and sustainable practices locally, regionally, and nationally. Ensuring that natural resources and their benefits advantage the local community is essential for environmental justice.



Natural resource governance in Kenya

International Aid Services (IAS) works in partnership with IAS Kenya, to protect natural resources and water sources in Tharaka, where water scarcity and land degradation threaten livelihoods. Through community-led projects, they construct earth dams and water pans to secure water supplies and promote reforestation with drought-resistant trees to restore ecosystems.

IAS also trains farmers in sustainable practices like agroforestry and conservation agriculture to reduce environmental pressure. A vital aspect of their work involves engaging religious leaders and local churches to promote environmental stewardship. Faith-based teachings emphasize caring for creation and fostering cultural and behavioral change.

Churches serve as key platforms for spreading information on sustainable resource use and mobilizing communities. IAS collaborates with government, religious actors, and civil society to foster advocacy on water and land use issues, ensuring equitable and sustainable governance.

Disaster risk reduction

Integrating disaster risk reduction (DRR) into climate strategies is essential for safeguarding lives and livelihoods in the Global South. Sustainable development in the Global South depends on anticipating, reducing, and managing disaster risks. SDG 1,3 emphasizes the importance of building resilience to environmental disasters among the poor and reducing their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events, shocks, and disasters.

Reduction of exposure and vulnerability requires a multifaceted approach. Warning systems can improve local communities' access to information and their ability to prepare and mitigate. Strengthened governance improves coordination between government sectors in disaster response. Empowering local authorities on risk reduction strategies and advocating for risk reduction plans and policies can lower the level of damage when a disaster hits. Furthermore, it is vital to advocate for budget allocation and prioritization of disaster resilient infrastructure especially in health and education. Incorporating DRR into recovery processes by ensuring post-disaster rebuilding processes reduces further risks. Finally, it is important to involve local communities, religious groups, local knowledge, and marginalized groups in planning and decision-making for effective adaptation and resilience-building.

Faith actors and religious institutions are often first responders in the event of a disaster, but they

can also play a key role in advocating for timely warning systems, good displacement solutions for persons at risk and allocation of funding for disaster prevention in relation to infrastructure, buildings and local resources.

Disaster risk reduction in Nepal

Mission East and KIRDARC collaborate to enhance disaster risk management in the Palata Rural Municipality, Kalikot District, Nepal. Their initiatives focus on building local capacities to prepare for and respond to disasters, ensuring long-term resilience.

The partnership has facilitated the establishment of Disaster Risk Management Committees (DRMCs) at municipal and ward levels providing training in vulnerability assessments, disaster monitoring, and emergency response. They have also supported the development of a Local Disaster and Climate Resilience Plan (LDCRP) and other DRR-focused policies, helping integrate disaster risk management into local governance.

Additionally, Mission East and KIRDARC have established a DRR resource center equipped with essential materials like first aid kits, life jackets, and DRR guidelines. This center serves as a hub for local preparedness and response efforts. Awareness campaigns and multi-stakeholder dialogues further strengthen community involvement and ensure collective action in disaster risk management.



Climate and conflict

Climate change and environmental degradation are drivers of conflict, especially in fragile regions where resources are scarce. Environmental pressures often intersect with social, economic, and political tensions, leading to conflicts that destabilize communities and undermine development efforts.

One of the clearest examples of how climate change can fuel conflict is through the unequal access to water. In many regions of the Global South climate change has led to prolonged droughts, unpredictable rainfall, and shrinking water supplies. This scarcity intensifies competition between tribes, ethnic and religious groups.

Churches and church-based organizations can play a critical role in facilitating dialogue between conflicting groups fostering agreements on resource-sharing and building trust. It is a prerequisite that the churches are not perceived as part of the conflict and are able to function as neutral ground for peace talks. Leveraging the unique position of faith-based organizations to mediate conflicts by promoting values of peace, reconciliation, and stewardship of creation, religious actors can play a critical role in fostering peace. Through their moral authority, they can strengthen governance and advocate for policies that ensure equitable access to natural resources, including water and land. Supporting communities in creating governance frameworks that regulate resource use, based on fairness and sustainability, helps mitigate competition over scarce resources.

Climate-related conflicts disproportionately affect the most vulnerable—such as women, children, and indigenous groups—who often lack a voice in the decision-making processes. Ensuring their active participation in resource management and climate adaptation strategies is key to achieving equitable outcomes. Equipping communities with the knowledge and tools to manage climate risks and conflicts themselves. This includes training in conflict resolution, sustainable resource use, and climate adaptation practices.

Resource scarcity and peacebuilding in Turkana

International Aid Services (IAS) and the Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) collaborate in Turkana to mitigate conflicts arising from water scarcity between Kalochaan and Lomunyenakwaan villages. The project rehabilitates water points and drills boreholes, providing equitable access to water for domestic use and livestock. To address resource-based conflicts, IAS and FPFK engage religious leaders as mediators to promote peace and reconciliation through dialogues and conflict management training.

The project combines traditional knowledge with modern resource management strategies to address disputes over water access. By organizing tree-planting initiatives around shared water points, the project fosters collaboration between communities, turning resource management into a tool for conflict resolution and environmental restoration. Faith leaders leverage their spiritual influence to advocate for environmental stewardship and peaceful coexistence, fostering long-term behavioral change. Through these efforts, communities adopt sustainable water-sharing agreements and reduce competition over scarce resources, enhancing resilience to climate-induced water conflicts.

Conclusion

In the face of escalating climate change and environmental degradation, it is imperative for CKU to integrate climate adaptation and environmental stewardship into the projects. Climate change disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities in the Global South, exacerbating poverty, food insecurity, and social tensions, especially around natural resources. Promoting equitable resource management, resilience-building, and active community engagement with religious institutions, CKU's umbrella can play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges.

CKU's strategy, grounded in the principles of social justice, faith-based peacebuilding, and environmental stewardship, seeks to empower vulnerable communities to adapt to climate change and promote sustainable practices. By partnering with church-based organizations and faith-based organizations, CKU amplifies its impact, leveraging the deep trust and moral authority that these institutions hold within their communities. Together, CKU and its partners are working towards a future where vulnerable populations have strengthened their ability to absorb, adapt and transform the consequences of climate change.

Endnotes

- 1 [eler-we-have-values-that-are-needed-faith-actors-and-civic-space-study-2024-web.pdf](#)
- 2 DIIS report 2022:2 Devolved finance and governance of climate change adaptation, 10.
- 3 DIIS report 2022:2 Devolved finance and governance of climate change adaptation,12.
- 4 DIIS report 2020:05 integrating Climate change adaptation and development, 22.