



Faith-Based Land Restoration and Conservation in Kenya

Nakuru Workshop Report 27th – 29th July 2025

Organized by: OikoDiplomatique

Introduction and Background

The Faith-Based Land Restoration and Conservation Workshop held in Nakuru from 27th to 29th July 2025 brought together a diverse group of religious leaders, faith-based organizations, cultural custodians, and community actors from across Kenya. The aim was to reflect on the progress of faith-led environmental restoration efforts, build stronger connections among practitioners, and identify concrete steps for scaling their impact.

This workshop is part of an ongoing process that began with the 2021 national land restoration conference hosted by ICRAF, which highlighted the importance of a faith-based approach to restoration. That event led to the formation of a faith-based action group committed to advancing restoration through spiritual and community platforms. Over time, members of the group have organized and participated in a series of regional and thematic dialogues, including:

- A roundtable at AACC in Nairobi in September 2024 that brought together key actors to reflect on emerging challenges and deepen interfaith collaboration
- Engagements in Mombasa and Kilifi focusing on mangrove restoration and land justice
- FMNR initiatives in Isiolo and Baringo working with pastoralist communities
- Advocacy work through platforms such as the Africa Faith Actors for Climate Justice

Throughout this journey, participants have emphasized the importance of using faith spaces and teachings to promote restoration, the role of church- and mosque-owned land, and the potential of community-based restoration practices that integrate cultural values, youth, and livelihoods.

The Nakuru workshop was convened to take stock of this progress, reconnect actors who have been working in different regions, and create a stronger, coordinated approach moving forward. The workshop also introduced new participants to the wider network and provided space for exchanging experiences, building capacity, and shaping a shared vision for faith-led restoration in Kenya.

The opening session included prayers from Sister Rose, Institute of Holy Trinity, Dr. Sheikh Hassan Kinyua, Inter-Religious Affairs, Peace League Africa, and Rev. John Nambair, the African Inland Church, followed by a welcome note from Ms. Nkatha Kobia, who emphasized the significance of the moment as a culmination of earlier efforts.



Oiko Diplomatieque's co-director Ms.Nkatha Kobia speaking at the workshop

Dr. Alan Channer noted that the strategic direction of faith-based restoration must be inspired and shaped by the 'wanchungaji'. The Nakuru workshop was designed as a team-building and knowledge-sharing event, focused on understanding what is already happening at the community level, what challenges are shared across contexts, and how the faith-based restoration movement can grow in reach, depth, and coordination, inspired and shaped by faith leaders.



OikoDiplomatique's co-director, Dr Alan Channer speaking at the workshop

Reflections on Current Activities in Faith-Based Restoration and Conservation

During the introductory session, each participant was invited to briefly present the work they are doing in land restoration, environmental stewardship, and community mobilization. From these individual contributions, several common and recurring themes emerged:

Key Themes That Emerged

- **Restoration as a Spiritual Duty** – Framing environmental action as a moral and theological imperative rooted in scriptures and faith teachings.
- **Faith-Owned Land as Demonstration Sites** – Potential to use church and mosque lands for tree-growing, farming, and ecosystem rehabilitation.
- **Environmental Education** – Use of Sunday schools, youth mentorship, and faith teachings to promote ecological awareness.
- **Community Forest Associations (CFAs)** – Collaborations between CFAs, government bodies (KFS, KEFRI), and faith institutions to co-develop forest management plans.
- **Interfaith Collaboration** – Growing momentum for unity across Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous traditions in restoration work.
- **Livelihood Integration** – Emphasis on agroforestry, fruit farming, poultry, and other economic activities tied to land restoration.
- **Charcoal Burning and Deforestation** – Widespread concern about the impact of charcoal trade on ecosystems and livelihoods.
- **Mangrove and Coastal Restoration** – Efforts in Mombasa, Kilifi, and Taita Taveta to restore marine ecosystems and address land injustices.
- **Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding** – Recognition of environmental degradation as a driver of intercommunal tension, particularly in pastoralist areas.
- **Role of Women and Youth** – Intentional strategies to empower women and engage children in restoration, especially through faith-based platforms.
- **Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge** – The use of traditional practices and values in guiding community-based restoration and the need to strengthen the land rights of indigenous communities, such as the Kaya, custodians of the Kaya indigenous forests on the coast.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflict** – Challenges arising from farming near elephant corridors and degraded rangelands.



Ms.Mariam Abdirashid contributing to the discussions at the workshop as Ms. Jane Jilani, Sister Cathy and Sister Rose listen in.

Key Impediments Identified

Community Participation and Capacity Gaps

- **Weak community engagement** and lack of shared ownership
- **Low technical capacity** in areas such as fundraising, legal literacy, and climate-smart planning
- **Insecurity and low adoption rates** due to a lack of sustained support
- **Ignorance** or misinformation around ecological practices

Land, Tenure, and Resource Constraints

- **Land access issues**, including contested ownership and unclear boundaries
- **Lack of water access** for sustainable tree-growing and land regeneration
- **Human-wildlife conflict** in areas where restoration overlaps with elephant or grazing corridors

Economic and Market Barriers

- **Limited funding** and **financial sustainability challenges**
- **Lack of access to markets** for restoration-linked livelihoods such as fruit trees or sustainable farming
- **Resistance to new ideas** in communities where survival needs take precedence

Cultural, Faith, and Intergenerational Tensions

- **Conflicts between traditional practices and faith teachings**
- **Different schools of thought** on how restoration should be done
- **Generational gaps**, especially a lack of platforms for youth and elders to collaborate
- **Gender inequality**, with women often sidelined despite central roles in land use

Environmental and Climate Challenges

- **Climate variability**, including unpredictable rainfall and extreme weather
- **Overgrazing** in pastoralist regions, contributing to degradation
- **Charcoal burning**, especially in drylands, both as a livelihood and a driver of conflict

Governance, Power, and Decision-Making

- **Poor leadership** and the use of community ideas for personal gain
- **Corruption and greed** that divert restoration benefits
- **Hierarchical systems** within faith institutions causing delayed action
- **Bureaucratic obstacles** that limit local initiative

Knowledge and Coordination Gaps

- **Lack of technical expertise** in tree species, soil, and land management
- **Siloed approaches** with little collaboration between actors
- **Confusion between tree planting and tree growing**, leading to failed efforts



Rev. John Nambair, Dr Alan Channer and Ms. Maryan Ntausian participate in group discussions during the workshop

Key Opportunities Identified

Despite the challenges, the workshop surfaced a wide range of opportunities for growth, innovation, and collaboration. These were seen as both immediate and long-term levers for faith-based restoration work.

Faith and Cultural Assets

- Use of **faith-owned land** for tree-growing, demonstration sites, and livelihoods
- Integration of **faith teachings and ethical frameworks** to promote stewardship and care for creation
- **Cultural practices** like rite-of-passage tree growing as entry points for restoration
- **Spiritual authority** of clergy and elders to influence behavior and mobilize action

People and Platforms

- **Women groups** as drivers of environmental and social change
- **Youth and children** as agents of transformation through schools, Sunday school, and mentorship
- **Faith congregations** as access points to large, diverse community audiences
- **Faith networks** across denominations and regions that can enable peer learning

Learning, Storytelling, and Knowledge Sharing

- Promotion of **local and Indigenous knowledge** through storytelling and practice
- Creation of **knowledge exchanges** and inter-regional visits (e.g., mangrove to dryland)
- Use of **media and social platforms** for awareness, advocacy, and behavior change

- Documentation of **best practices and scalable models** for wide dissemination

Policy, Funding, and Partnership Potential

- Alignment with **county climate action plans** and development strategies
- Potential to access **national and county climate adaptation budgets**
- Engagement with **agriculture and forestry services** (MOA, KFS, KEFRI)
- Exploration of **carbon credit schemes**, clean energy models, and green jobs

Restorative Justice and Inclusion

- Use of **faith-led spaces** to address historical land injustices
- Bridging **intergenerational and intergender divides** through dialogue and joint action
- Championing **justice for internally displaced persons (IDPs)** affected by climate events
- Developing **theologies of environmental justice and reconciliation**



Dr. Sheikh Hassan Kinyua, Ms. Nkatha Kobia, Rev. Jane Jilani and Mr Joseph Njoroge participate in group discussions at the workshop

Synergies and Strengths in Faith-Based Restoration

Throughout the workshop, participants identified several areas where faith-based actors, cultural institutions, and local communities are already aligned in their values, approaches, and goals. These synergies form a strong foundation for scaling restoration work across Kenya.

Shared Values and Vision

- A collective sense of **service to vulnerable communities**

- Common **intergenerational and intergender commitments**
- A shared **moral responsibility** to care for creation
- Alignment around **stewardship, peacebuilding, and social justice**

Faith and Cultural Integration

- Use of **faith teachings and scripture** to promote restoration
- **Incorporation of indigenous knowledge** and cultural practices
- Engagement of **traditional leaders and elders** in restoration planning

Collaborative Structures

- **Interfaith and inter-community partnerships** that bring together Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous actors
- Joint **advocacy and policy engagement** at local and national levels
- Collaboration with **pastoralist and farming communities**

Knowledge and Capacity Exchange

- **Shared training and capacity building** efforts between organizations and communities
- **Knowledge sharing** of best practices in tree growing, sustainable agriculture, and water conservation
- Integration of **agricultural extension services** (e.g. MOA, KFS, KEFRI, health promoters)

Community-Based Implementation

- Strong community participation through **churches, mosques, and community groups**
- **Youth and women empowerment** through direct involvement in restoration activities
- Opportunities for **multi-farming systems** that link restoration with food security and livelihoods

Communication and Awareness

- Collective use of **sermons, storytelling, and dialogue forums** to raise awareness
- **Awareness creation** through existing faith networks
- Use of **faith-based messaging** to promote climate justice and behavior change

Policy and Planning Alignment

- Growing alignment with **County Climate Action Plans (CCAPs)** and restoration policies
- Potential for faith-based actors to support **implementation of government restoration targets**

Case Studies and Faith-Inspired Innovations

Church Forests of Ethiopia

OikoDiplomatique has been invited by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Development and Inter Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC) to help develop a Church Forest Academy for faith-based restoration practitioners from the region. This will build on the unique legacy of Ethiopia's 35,000 church forests and the underlying ecotheology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which has sustained them for almost two millennia. It is hoped that pilot course will be held in the first half of 2026.

Sunday School Peacebuilding Model–East Pokot

In East Pokot, a locally developed Sunday school initiative has been instrumental in bridging divides between historically conflicting communities. The program targets children in Grades 5 and 6, bringing them together for a three-day session designed to foster friendship and mutual understanding across

communal lines. A key part of the initiative involves each child identifying a peer from the other community, whom they then visit at home. During these visits, the guest child is introduced to the host family. Because the friendship is initiated by the children, parents are inclined to receive the visitors warmly, regardless of any past tensions. In doing so, parents from opposing sides become indirectly engaged in the peacebuilding process. Over time, trust develops not only between the children but also between their families. As relationships grow deeper, what begins as a simple act of hospitality evolves into a channel for inter-community dialogue and cooperation. In many cases, parents now call each other to share information about potential security risks, such as the movement of bandits, and even collaborate in notifying government authorities. During the workshop, participants reflected on how this peacebuilding model could be expanded to include environmental restoration. For instance, children could be encouraged to plant trees in each other's homes during the visits. These trees would then become symbols of shared responsibility and interdependence, deepening the roots of both peace and restoration. By linking environmental care with relational healing, this model offers a powerful, faith-inspired pathway for long-term community resilience.

University Students Mentoring Children on Waste Management and Circular Economy – Tangaza University, Nairobi

As part of **Laudato Si**–inspired activities at **Tangaza University in Nairobi**, a mentorship initiative has been established where university students engage younger children on issues of environmental sustainability. The focus is on **waste management, circular economy practices**, and the spiritual responsibility of caring for creation. This model creates meaningful **intergenerational learning spaces**, where children are introduced to complex environmental concepts in accessible, age-appropriate ways, guided by slightly older peers who model both knowledge and conviction. The mentorship often takes place through **church networks and faith-based platforms**, ensuring that the learning is rooted not only in science but also in the values of faith, stewardship, and shared responsibility. By combining **youth activism, faith formation, and practical environmental education**, the initiative strengthens ecological consciousness in the next generation while reinforcing the role of faith institutions as spaces for transformation. It also demonstrates how **Laudato Si**, a global Catholic call to ecological conversion, is being translated into action at the local level — nurturing both minds and values in service to the environment.

Clergy-Led Tree Growing with Child Stewardship – A Proposed Model

During the workshop, participants discussed the potential for clergy to play a catalytic role in tree-growing efforts by directly involving children in congregations. The idea builds on the deep respect that children often have for religious leaders. In this proposed model, faith leaders would lead by example by planting trees in church compounds or community spaces and then assign responsibility for the trees to individual children. These children would be entrusted with nurturing the trees, watering, monitoring growth, and ensuring their survival. The symbolic act of receiving a tree from a trusted religious figure could instill a strong sense of personal responsibility and spiritual accountability. Participants noted that this approach could help increase tree survival rates, as children are likely to take the role seriously when it is endorsed and encouraged by clergy. More broadly, the initiative would serve as a practical way to teach care for creation, integrate environmental education into faith formation, and connect ecological action to spiritual practice from an early age.

Cultural Inspiration for Restoration – Kikuyu “Zingira” Tradition

In Kikuyu culture, boys undergoing initiation into manhood traditionally build a small structure known as zingira as part of the rite of passage. This cultural milestone has been integrated with restoration by encouraging boys to grow their own trees years in advance, which they will later use to construct the zingira. This approach revives and honors Indigenous knowledge while embedding restoration into cultural practices, making tree-growing a meaningful and long-term personal investment.

The Way Forward for Faith-Based Restoration

1. Shift from Tree Planting to Tree Growing

Participants emphasized the need to focus on tree survival, not just planting numbers. Many noted that tree planting is often done for visibility, but without long-term care or follow-up. Embracing “tree growing” means committing to maintenance, monitoring, and sustainability.

2. Integrate Restoration with Livelihoods

Restoration efforts must also improve people’s lives. Participants highlighted practices like poultry keeping, fruit farming, and multi-cropping as examples where environmental and economic goals align. This integration helps ensure community support and sustainability.

3. Strengthen and Share Knowledge Through Tailored Training and Exchange Programs

There was strong support for structured exchange visits between regions. These would allow communities and faith groups to learn directly from one another’s experiences, such as the Church Forests of Ethiopia, mangrove restoration at the Coast or FMNR in drylands, and adapt lessons to their own contexts.

4. Use and Understand Emerging Technologies

Participants pointed out the need to build capacity around digital tools and restoration technologies. Many are unaware of apps like KEFRIApp or Jazamiti, which could support decision-making and monitoring. Training in such tools was recommended.

5. Align Restoration with Faith Teachings

Restoration should be framed as a spiritual responsibility. Participants called for more faith leaders to teach about stewardship, care for creation, and the moral obligation to restore land. Sermons and faith education can help shift mindsets at the community level.

6. Promote Environmental and Restorative Justice

Environmental damage is often linked to injustice and exclusion. Restoration should address past harms, such as land displacement, and ensure that benefits reach vulnerable groups. Faith platforms can support reconciliation and inclusion in this process.

7. Recognize Faith Institutions as Change Agents

Participants affirmed that faith institutions are not peripheral to restoration — they are central. With land, influence, and networks, churches and mosques have a unique role to lead and coordinate efforts across regions and denominations.

8. Align with County and National Plans

To access funding and technical support, faith-based efforts should connect with existing County Climate Action Plans and government-led restoration programs. Collaboration with agencies like KEFRI, KFS, and county governments was encouraged.



Participants take a picture after the last workshop session