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THEME: Strengthening Research and Innovations for Climate Adaptation and Sustainable Development

Annual tree planting activities by the church and impact on participants' knowledge and attitudes towards climate change: The ACK, Embu Dioceses, Kenya

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Abstract

Environmental problems in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region have worsened during the last twenty years. Trends in loss of vegetation cover, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, threaten the region's biodiversity, water resources, and livelihoods of millions of people. UN demographic projections suggest that the rates of urbanization in the region will be among the highest in the next 20 decades. The rates of deforestation in region are among the highest in the world, with firewood the main source of energy for cooking for rural households now becoming more scarce, or unaffordable. In the last ten years, several churches have mobilized local participation in tree planting to reverse environmental degradation and protect livelihoods. However, there is limited research on the social impacts of participating in annual church organized tree planting on participants' knowledge and attitudes towards climate change and mitigation. We used a cross-sectional survey to compare knowledge and attitudes between participants and non-participants in the annual tree planting activities organized by the Anglican Church in Embu diocese, Kenya. Data were collected using self-administered questions. Preliminary results showed that compared to non-participants, households involved in the annual tree planting activities were more aware and knowledgeable about global climate change, its causes, ways to mitigate the phenomenon and measures to adapt and minimize impacts. The implied enhanced environmental stewardship among participants bodes well with policies aimed at promoting environmental stewardship in citizens. Further research is needed to explore questions related to sustainability of the trees planted. Also, there is need to research to investigate how annual tree planting practices can be scaled to other churches in the Kenya, the barriers likely to be encountered, and ways to overcome them. This findings have important implications on Kenya's forest conservation. The country is struggling to realize the target of 10% increase of forest cover by 2030. The government lacks the resources required to achieve the target; participation by different stakeholders such as the ACK, Embu diocese are promising as one way of rallying citizens to play their part in increasing the country's tree cover.

Key words: Climate adaptation, church, green initiatives, environmental knowledge, attitudes, Embu, Kenya