



IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER
Ezekiel 47:9, 12

Season of Creation: Week 4

BIODIVERSITY

Variety is (the spice of) Life

CALLED TO LIVE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

*The principle of **subsidiarity** acknowledges that decisions and management responsibilities pertaining to water should take place at the lowest appropriate level. While the water issue is global in scope, it is at the local level where decisive action can best be taken. The engagement of communities at the grassroots level is key to the success of water programs.* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, A Contribution of the Holy See to the Third World Water Forum, Kyoto, 2003)

Through contemplation of the natural world created by God (Job 7–12), we are invited to move from domination to humility, from exploitation to care, and from short-term profit to long-term flourishing. This transformation is both spiritual and practical, requiring a rethinking of values, economic systems, and educational priorities. We focus here on the importance of trees to biodiversity.

WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE?

- In Britain, the estimated value of trees for flood protection is £6.5 billion.
- In England, native woods and trees support a fifth of the UK's Priority Species for conservation.
- Ancient woodland in particular supports more species than any other land-based habitat in the UK.
- The UK is in the lowest 12% of global countries and territories for 'biodiversity intactness', caused by industrialisation, changes in land use and water bodies, and deforestation
- Woodland cover in the UK is one of the lowest in Europe; one third of all woodland wildlife species are in decline, while 10% of woodland wildlife species are at risk of extinction.
- 20 million trees are to be planted across Bristol, Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire by 2050, in a national forest to be called Western Forest.
- Invasive species of trees and animals are undermining water courses (eg Himalayan balsam can take over whole stretches of waterway banks.
- It is estimated that ash dieback will kill up to 50-75% of ash trees across the UK

AND FURTHER AFIELD

- Forests cover almost a third of the global land area and harbour most of the Earth's terrestrial biodiversity.
- Forests contain 60,000 different tree species, 80 percent of amphibian species, 75 percent of bird species, and 68 percent of the world's mammal species.
- Forests provide more than 86 million green jobs.
- Of those living in extreme poverty, over 90 percent are dependent on forests for wild food, firewood or part of their livelihoods.
- Since the 1970s, c.20% of the Amazon has been lost due to deforestation.
- Since 1990, around 420 million hectares of forest have been lost through conversion to other land uses.
- Forest fragmentation – from agriculture, urbanisation, transport corridors and industry, isolating pockets of forest – leaves species isolated, endangers biodiversity, carbon storage, and soil health
- Oil palm expansion is a major driver of deforestation and degradation of natural habitats in parts of tropical Asia and Central and South America
- The Great Green Wall Initiative in Africa has transformed livelihoods and the environment where local communities have taken ownership of it.

ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE

- Buy locally produced food
- Buy only sustainably produced palm oil and other products
- Buy only items with FSC and PEFC logos (items made with resources from sustainably managed forests and other controlled sources).
- Plant an indigenous tree!
- Support biosecurity (minimise disease transfer) – Arrive Clean, Leave Clean, and Keep it Clean!
- Avoid planting invasive plants, and clear those you find
- Avoid using pesticides
- Leave an area of your garden / outside space uncultivated



SUBSIDIARITY: KEEPING IT IN THE COMMUNITY



The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel

is a project adopted by the African Union in 2007, initially conceived as a way to combat desertification in the Sahel region and hold back expansion of the Sahara Desert, by planting a wall of trees stretching across the entire Sahel from Djibouti City, Djibouti to Dakar, Senegal. The original dimensions of the "wall" were to be 15 km (9 mi) wide and 7,775 km (4,831 mi) long, but the program expanded to encompass nations in both northern and western Africa. The concept evolved into promoting water harvesting techniques, greenery protection and improving indigenous land use techniques, aimed at creating a mosaic of green and productive landscapes across North Africa.

Later it adopted the view that desert boundaries change based on rainfall variations.

The Sahara is advancing relentlessly across the Sahel, expanding by nearly 10 per cent since the 1920s. In Nigeria, around 35,000 hectares of land are lost each year as the desert continues to encroach southwards.

In 2021, about a hundred farmers in Garbadu village, a community of roughly 6,000 people who rely on farming in Zamfara State in northwestern Nigeria, were invited by officials of the National Agency for the Great Green Wall to plant trees across a large stretch of land in their community. Shehu remembers how fierce, dust-laden winds from the Sahara Desert often tore off the roof of his home and damaged his farmland. For him, taking part in the tree-planting exercise was a way to confront this challenge, especially after seeing the impact of similar interventions in other northern states such as Kaduna, Bauchi, and Jigawa, where desertification has degraded once fertile land.

In Garbadu many had abandoned their fields, resulting in falling incomes and growing food shortages. However, the tree-planting initiative is beginning to reverse this trend.

Murtala Bado, the village head of Garbadu, said one sign of the Great Green Wall Initiative's progress is the behavioural change among community members in a region where deforestation is a serious problem.

He said that people are now aware of the benefits of trees and no longer cut them in the Great Green Wall Initiative project sites.

Nigeria

Focus: *Combating desertification and improving livelihoods*

- Afforestation and reforestation
- Shelterbelt development
- Community based land management

Main achievements:

- * Shelterbelt corridors spanning 1,500km across 11 frontline states
- * Thousands of hectares restored
- * Job creation in rural communities
- * Increased awareness of tree protection
- * 3,000ha of land restored
- * 2,801ha under assisted natural regeneration

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"The project has been really impactful here. Previously strong winds would rip off our roofs, but now it is no longer frequent. Before the plantation, the soil of the areas where the trees are now barely held water, but now it does have moisture and I'm happy the area is slowly turning green again," said farmer Shehu, who added that he continues to care for the trees.

"The project has even provided employment opportunities for people here. Farmers who are part of it receive allowances from the government. This project cannot work if there are no people to take care of it. And for people to actually show up and take interest means that it is going to be sustainable in the long term"

Learning from our sisters and brothers: In our own part of the world too, climate change can lead to more frequent high wind gusts; and will worsen the impacts of soil erosion.

Planting trees and shrubs in our own spaces can protect our soil and relieve us of the increasing wind gusts

Join the Grounds Group! Led by Asia Hutchinson, the group will get together on the morning of **Saturday 26th September** to look over the grounds of OLSE to see how we can best care for our green space.