

Church's Ecological Stewardship and Sustainability: A Dogmatic Approach to Sensitizing Community on Habit Change in Kenya

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Abstract

Environmental stewardship underscores humanity's God-given mandate to care for creation, affirming the Church's moral obligation to safeguard the environment (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 24:1). Scripture emphasizes the interconnectedness of nature and the need for responsible human activity; thereby, positioning the Church as a central actor in fostering environmental sustainability, and mitigating climate change. However, despite biblical clarity on ecological stewardship, the Church globally has largely been passive in stimulating environmental consciousness among the congregants. Most initiatives, whether global, regional, or local, tend to focus on corporate social responsibility rather than inspiring lasting ecological commitment within congregations. A notable dogmatic gap exists in integrating environmental stewardship teachings into sermons, doctrines, and worship practices. This paper explored the dogmatic approach to strengthening the Church's role in ecological preservation and sustainability, assessing how effectively churches employ theological teachings to inspire behavioural change. Relying on documentary analysis of secondary sources, it examined diverse cases of church-led initiatives, including educational programs, renewable energy adoption, sustainable building designs, conservation projects, support for sustainable agriculture, and advocacy for environmental justice. Findings reveal that while theological beliefs often drive such efforts, the absence of structured doctrinal integration limits their transformative impact. The paper recommends prioritizing congregants' behavioural change by embedding ecological stewardship within core teachings, sermons, and doctrines. Sensitization sessions for pastoral staff should precede wider congregational rollouts, fostering deeper engagement. Additionally, the Church should strengthen collaborations, expand advocacy, and partner in developing environmental stewardship policies. By embracing a dogmatic approach, the Church can significantly influence attitudes and practices, contributing meaningfully to a more sustainable and just world (Proverbs 12:10; Revelation 11:18).

Keywords: *Environmental stewardship, ecological stewardship, dogmatic approach to environment, church, Kenya*

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1.0 Introduction

Ecological stewardship, also called environmental stewardship, refers to deliberate actions by stewards in caring for, protecting, conserving, and sustaining the environment, addressing ecosystems, air, energy, land, materials, and water. These actions are grounded in principles of care, responsibility, and sustainability. Biblically, this stewardship is rooted in humanity's divine mandate to safeguard creation, affirming human–nature interconnectedness and the moral duty to preserve environment for future generations.

Genesis 1:26 grants humanity dominion, understood not as exploitation, but as responsibility to ensure sustainability, while Genesis 2:15 charges humankind to “tend and keep” creation. Psalm 24:1 affirms God's ownership of the earth, and Psalm 104 celebrates creation's interdependence. Romans 8:19–21 links ecological crises to human exploitation yet offers hope for creation's restoration. Christ's teachings on love and compassion (Mark 12:31) extend to environmental care, framing it as an expression of divine love.

Integrating these principles into Church doctrines, sermons, and worship fosters theological conviction and an environmentally-conscious behavioural transformation. The Word of God, when faithfully taught and applied, inspires lifestyle changes toward habitual environmental care. However, many existing church initiatives—though valuable—remain framed as community service or corporate social responsibility, often lacking sustained behavioural impact. This reflects a dogmatic gap: the under-integration of ecological stewardship into formal teaching.

A dogmatic approach, grounded in Scripture, redefines ecological care as a spiritual duty and moral imperative. Pastoral sensitization on ecological theology should precede

congregational training to ensure coherence and commitment. The Church must also engage in advocacy, partnerships, and policy dialogue, collaborating with environmental organizations, interfaith actors, and policymakers. Sharing best practices and fostering interdenominational cooperation strengthens global sustainability efforts. Thus, the Church fulfils its biblical mandate and moral obligation to protect and cherish creation; thus, ensuring preservation of creation for future generations (Proverbs 12:10; Revelation 11:18).

Statement of the problem

Biblical teachings are explicit on ecological stewardship, with scripture affirming humanity's divine mandate to care for creation (*Genesis 1:26; 2:15; Psalm 24:1*). Ideally, the church is expected to integrate environmental teachings into its core liturgy to inspire and trigger behavioural change among congregants, fostering environmental sustainability as a mainstream biblical obligation rather than an optional initiative.

In practice, however, many churches worldwide have played a largely passive role in influencing congregants' behaviour toward ecological responsibility. Environmental activities undertaken by most churches are often limited to community service or corporate social responsibility projects, rather than being embedded in regular sermons and doctrinal teachings. Only a few have deliberately mainstreamed ecological stewardship teaching in their liturgy and theological programs, which may explain the church's limited impact on climate change action (Cuffey, 2016).

This lack of systematic integration represents a significant dogmatic gap. Sermons and teachings are inherently transformative, expected to shape conduct in all areas of life, yet their omission of environmental stewardship weakens congregants' environmental consciousness and

behavioural resilience against climate change. The result is a disconnect between scriptural directives and lived practices, contributing to continued environmental degradation within communities.

Notably, embedding ecological stewardship in regular church teachings has the potential to awaken individual and collective responsibility, encouraging actions that align with biblical principles and reducing environmentally destructive practices. This paper, therefore, explored how deliberate theological integration of ecological stewardship can stimulate holistic behavioural change, strengthening the church's role in promoting environmental sustainability.

Purpose of the study

This paper explored the dogmatic approach to fostering Churches' ecological stewardship and sustainability in Kenya.

Research Objective

The objective was to assess how churches in Kenya have embraced dogmatic approach in sensitizing congregants to adopt behavioral change in creating a sustainable environment.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This is a systematic review paper that sought to explore how churches in Meru County have embraced the dogmatic approach in sensitizing congregants to adopt behavioral change in creating a sustainable environment. In that connection, a systematic documentary analysis of secondary sources was carried out, where search statements were developed to guide in soliciting critical information.

"The literature revealed that inadequate integration of ecological stewardship into sermons and doctrine, created a dogmatic gap that weakens theological grounding on environmental transformation"

The search strategy adopted mainly focused on Churches' ecological stewardship and sustainability, environment stewardship, Biblical teaching, Bible and environment sustainability, cases of church involvement in environment sustainability; Church and climate change; how church should sustain environment, and Bible verses on environment sustainability and climate change. By executing the search strategies, it enabled the research to obtain reports, past studies and conference proceedings, which were analyzed systematically as guided by the aforementioned themes. The systematic reviews enabled the researcher to synthesize information on theoretical foundations which informed the development of this paper.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Churches worldwide have demonstrated fair engagement in promoting sustainable environmental stewardship and conservation efforts through their faith and mission, and seeking to preserve God's creation for present and future generations. Leading by example, churches demonstrate their commitment to environmental stewardship and inspire their communities to adopt sustainable practices.

Behavioural change is not a one-time event, but, is a practical process that requires patience and continuous education and training, as well as promotional and investment programs to constantly remind congregants of their active role in ecological stewardship.

Overview of Church's Experiences on Ecological Stewardship and Sustainability

The Church worldwide has taken concrete steps toward reducing ecological footprint; hence, building community resilience to some extent. It has carried out numerous ecological stewardship activities touching on air, ecosystems, energy, land, materials, and water conservation across different countries. Selected cases were reviewed and presented in the sections that follow.

Global Church Initiatives in Ecological Stewardship: Lessons from the Church in United States of America and Canada

In the United States, numerous churches exemplify environmental stewardship through sustainable operations and community engagement. St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Seattle, Washington, has installed solar panels, adopted energy-efficient lighting, initiated recycling programs, hosted environmental education events, and partnered with local organizations to promote sustainability (GreenFaith, 2022). New Life Church in Colorado Springs operates an organic farm supplying fresh produce to the community and food banks. Faith-based coalitions, including the GreenFaith initiative, engaging over 1,000 congregations, to promote energy conservation, sustainable farming, and waste reduction (GreenFaith, 2022). Blessed Tomorrow equips faith leaders with resources for renewable energy adoption and efficiency (National Council of Churches, 2022).

Environmental justice ministries address disproportionate environmental burdens on marginalized communities by combating pollution, hazardous waste disposal, and poor access to green spaces. Many churches employ sustainable building practices - energy-efficient designs, renewable materials, and eco-technologies - which reduce waste, energy use, and improve indoor quality (Igreja & Cunha, 2017). Community initiatives include gardens that enhance food security, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture education (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2023), alongside recycling, e-waste, and water conservation programs (Cuffey, 2016).

In Canada, similar advances are evident. The Cathedral of the Holy Family (Saskatoon) and St. Anne's Anglican Church (Toronto) integrate eco-spirituality in worship, workshops, and conferences, while employing energy-efficient lighting, rainwater harvesting, and geothermal systems. The United and Anglican Churches of Canada promote recycling, land conservation, organic farming, and renewable energy through the "Greening Sacred Spaces" program (Merck Sustainability Report, 2022). Other examples of ecological stewardship initiatives include the Presbyterian Church in Canada's advocacy for sustainable transport; as well as Mennonite Church Canada's promotion of responsible land use. Interfaith networks, such as Faith and the Common Good, support diverse religious communities in energy conservation and community gardening.

These cases illustrate the power of faith-based ecological leadership, aligning action with Genesis 2:15 ("tend and keep" the earth) and Psalm 24:1, inspiring sustained behavioral change toward environmental sustainability.

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in the United Kingdom

Several UK churches actively engage in conservation and habitat restoration through tree planting, wetland restoration, and park and river clean-ups, thereby preserving biodiversity, enhancing ecosystem services, and deepening congregants' connection with nature (Hessel, 2016). In response to climate change, many have divested from fossil fuels, invested in renewables, and adopted clean energy technologies—such as solar panels and wind turbines—reducing greenhouse gas emissions and modelling sustainable practice. Collaboration with environmental organizations, government agencies, and interfaith groups has strengthened advocacy and policy development for sustainability and environmental justice (Moore & Mitchell, 2017).

Notable examples include Bristol Cathedral, which reduced carbon emissions via energy-efficient heating and lighting, waste reduction, and sustainable procurement (Leveque, 2019), and St. Paul's Cathedral, which promotes sustainable transport, hosts climate awareness events, and adopts eco-friendly practices under the "Eco-Church" movement. The Rocha UK initiative equips churches to assess and minimize environmental impact across energy, waste, biodiversity, and community engagement. Many churches with large land holdings restore biodiversity through wildlife-friendly churchyards, native species planting, and wetland creation (The Church of England, 2021).

These efforts reflect biblical mandates such as Genesis 2:15 ("tend and keep" the earth) and Psalm 24:1 (God's ownership of creation). Doctrinal integration is evident in "Climate Sunday" services, linking faith and environmental action (The Church of England, 2020). Churches also engage in policy advocacy, support the Paris Accord,

and collaborate with local authorities to assist communities disproportionately affected by environmental degradation.

By embedding ecological stewardship into worship, operations, and outreach, UK churches demonstrate that environmental sustainability is a theological and practical imperative. Through renewable energy adoption, biodiversity restoration, waste reduction, and advocacy, they model responsible dominion as instructed in Genesis 1:26, fostering a greener, more sustainable future for congregations and society.

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in Germany

Environmental stewardship in Germany is deeply embedded in cultural and social values, with churches integrating ecological responsibility into their ministries alongside spiritual missions. For instance, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the largest Protestant body, leads the *Klimafasten* (Climate Fasting) campaign during Lent, urging members to reduce energy consumption, adopt eco-friendly transport, and support local, fair-trade products, while raising awareness of environmental justice and its link to social issues. The Catholic Church, through the German Bishops' Conference, established the "Environmental Pastoral" Department to embed ecological perspectives into church life, complemented by "Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation" (JPIC) commissions that educate, advocate for reforms, and foster sustainable food systems through "Solidarity Purchasing Groups" connecting consumers with local farmers.

Protestant regional churches implement targeted conservation measures: the Church in Baden preserves wetlands and wildlife sanctuaries; the Evangelical Church of Westphalia supports organic farming; and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, as

well as the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau, invests in renewable energy for church operations. These initiatives strengthen the theological link between creation care and spirituality, echoing Genesis 2:15's call to "tend and keep" the earth.

German churches also engage in interfaith environmental collaboration. The Ecumenical Network "Churches and Mining" unites Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders to address mining's ecological impacts and advocate for sustainable alternatives. By joining coalitions that shape environmental legislation, churches leverage moral authority to promote policies aligned with biblical stewardship, such as Psalm 24:1 which affirm God's ownership of creation.

Through practical action, advocacy, and cross-faith cooperation, German churches model ecological sustainability as both a moral obligation and a spiritual mandate, integrating renewable energy adoption, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable consumption into faith-based practice; thereby demonstrating responsible dominion consistent with Genesis 1:26.

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in Italy

Environmental stewardship is also evident in Italy. For example, the Vatican has been a vocal advocate for environmental stewardship and has issued several documents emphasizing the importance of caring for the Earth. Pope Francis's encyclical letter, "Laudato Si'," published in 2015, explicitly addresses environmental issues and calls for global action to protect the planet. Catholic parishes have responded to this call by initiating various eco-friendly projects (Pope Francis, 2015). The Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Assisi has also embraced solar power, using photovoltaic systems to meet its energy needs. These initiatives not only contribute to reducing carbon emissions,

but also serve as educational platforms for visitors (De Lucia & Strazzullo, 2020). The Papal Basilica of St. Peter in Vatican city has also implemented a comprehensive waste management system, including separate waste collection for recycling materials (Klass, 2018).

Some monasteries have also established organic gardens and orchards, cultivating fruits, vegetables, and herbs using sustainable farming methods (De Lucia & Strazzullo, 2020). These initiatives not only provide fresh and healthy produce for the monastic communities, but also serve as models for sustainable food production and promote the concept of "eating locally." Churches in Italy have also played a role in protecting and preserving natural habitats. Many more have upgraded insulation, installed efficient heating and cooling systems, and encouraged energy conservation practices among their clergy and staff (Pane, 2017; Valluzzi, 2019).

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in France

While churches in France primarily focus on religious teachings and practices, many have also taken steps to actively engage in environmental stewardship initiatives. The Catholic Church for example participate in local clean-up campaigns, supporting eco-friendly agricultural practices, and engaging in reforestation efforts (Chan & Dube, 2018; Duran, 2015). Some Protestant churches in France have also established programs that promotes environmental conservation; installed water-saving fixtures and educated their members about the importance of water conservation (Bauckham & Hart, 2014; Hasselbeck, 2015). They also encourage their members to use public transportation or carpool to reduce carbon emissions. In certain cases, churches have also installed bicycle racks and organized cycling events to promote eco-friendly commuting alternatives (Leal & Azul, 2018; Wilson, 2016).

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in Australia

In Australia, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Frankston, Victoria, has integrated environmental stewardship into its operations. The church has also installed rainwater harvesting systems, energy-efficient lighting, and solar panels. In addition, it engages in community outreach programs, including beach clean-ups and environmental education sessions, to promote environmental awareness and action. The church has cathedral's gardens where it has planted native and drought-tolerant plants; hence, promoting biodiversity and water conservation. Other churches that have demonstrated consciousness towards environmental sustainability in Australia are the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, Uniting Church in Australia, the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia. Apart from embarking and promoting environmental sustainable practices, these churches also emphasize the spiritual connection between humanity and the natural world, and encourage their members to be responsible stewards of God's creation. The Uniting Church in Western Australia is on record for establishing an Eco-Mission Network that promotes ecological awareness among its congregations. The Baptist Union of Victoria has also created a "Creation Care Taskforce" to provide guidance and resources to its churches on environmental matters (Cuffey, 2016; Kidwell & McBride, 2015).

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in Asia

In Asia, several churches have integrated environmental stewardship into their ministries through practical and community-based initiatives. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church's Kottayam Diocese in Kerala, India, implements organic farming, reforestation, and waste management programs in partnership with local

communities to protect natural resources and wildlife (Hasselbeck, 2015). In South Korea, the Green Church Network mobilizes thousands of congregations to adopt sustainable practices, energy conservation, waste reduction, eco-friendly building designs, and engages in tree planting, environmental education, and policy advocacy on climate change.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) has issued guidelines on ecological conservation and sustainable development (CBCI, 2017). Churches such as the Church of South India (CSI) and the Mar Thoma Church operate recycling centers, composting facilities, and waste segregation systems, alongside tree planting, soil conservation, and biodiversity programs (Chacko, 2018; Thomas, 2017). These churches actively participate in joint advocacy campaigns, policy discussions, and partnerships that promote sustainable development and environmental justice. Similarly, community-led conservation projects revive traditional ecological knowledge, safeguard ecosystems, and promote sustainable livelihoods. These efforts align with *Genesis 2:15*, which calls humanity to "tend and keep" the earth, and *Psalms 24:1*, affirming divine ownership of creation, thereby integrating theology with ecological responsibility.

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in Africa

Environmental stewardship is a pressing concern in Africa, given its rich biodiversity and natural resources. Churches play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable practices, drawing on biblical teachings such as *Genesis 2:15*—"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it", to emphasize humanity's duty to care for creation (Steve, 2005). Across the continent, faith-based initiatives advance organic farming,

agroforestry, and the integration of traditional knowledge to conserve soil fertility and water (Morris & Dunne, 2015).

In South Africa, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa develops environmental education resources, while the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference issues pastoral letters linking ecological protection with safeguarding vulnerable communities (Chan & Dube, 2018). Interfaith initiatives further unite religious communities against environmental threats.

In Zambia, the Council of Churches in Zambia's Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment (RICE) trains farmers in organic and conservation agriculture (CCZ, 2018). The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian collaborates with the Zambia Wildlife Authority on community-based wildlife protection (Cummings, 2017). The United Church of Zambia implements water and sanitation projects, while the Zambia Episcopal Conference advocates for responsible mining and national park protection (ZEC, 2016). The Reformed Church in Zambia conducts environmental education on climate change, waste management, and biodiversity (Nyirenda, 2018).

In Nigeria, the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja's *Green Abuja Project* aims to plant one million trees (Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, 2020). Other initiatives include tree nurseries, rural water systems, renewable energy promotion, solar power projects, environmental awareness campaigns, and soil erosion control led by denominations such as the Christian Reformed Church, Anglican Communion Environmental and Sanitation Programme (ACESP), Nigerian Baptist Convention, Methodist Church, Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos' JDPC, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church spearheads the *Green*

Legacy Initiative, planting billions of trees annually (EOTC, 2019). Its Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission promotes water conservation, while the Kale Heywet Church, Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church, and Mekane Yesus Central Ethiopia Synod advance forest conservation, organic farming, and community clean-ups.

In Tanzania, the Evangelical Lutheran Church leads climate-smart agriculture and reforestation (ELCT, 2017), while the Moravian Church and Lutheran Church of Tanzania focus on biodiversity protection, waste management, and environmental policy advocacy.

These church-led interventions integrate sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, water and sanitation conservation, and renewable energy advocacy, addressing socio-economic dimensions and protecting marginalized communities in alignment with Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." By combining theological imperatives with practical actions, African churches demonstrate that faith-based organizations can significantly advance environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and ecological justice.

In Uganda, churches significantly advance environmental sustainability through diverse initiatives. The Roman Catholic Church leads tree-planting campaigns, land restoration, renewable energy adoption, and policy advocacy (Gen. 2:15). The Seventh-day Adventist Church promotes agroforestry, climate-smart farming, solar installations, and clean-up drives. The Pentecostal Assemblies of God, partnering with environmental bodies, advocates against deforestation, land degradation, and climate change, fostering sustainable development in alignment with biblical stewardship (Ps. 24:1).

Church-Led Ecological Stewardship in Kenya

In Kenya, churches have undertaken diverse initiatives in environmental stewardship, although often as project-based interventions, rather than integrated theological mandates (Gen. 2:15; Ps. 24:1). The Redeemed Gospel Church collaborates with communities in Nakuru and Baringo to construct water catchment systems, while the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret establishes tree nurseries and planting campaigns to restore degraded lands. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) Women's Guild implements tree planting across counties to bolster ecosystem resilience. The African Inland Church (AIC) promotes conservation agriculture, organic farming, and agroforestry in Nyeri and Siaya, while All Saints' Cathedral and Nairobi Chapel conduct waste management and clean-up drives. The African Gospel Church partners with communities in Mombasa and Kisumu for waste management and public education.

The Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) implements solar energy projects in Meru and Kericho, alongside reforestation efforts, while the Catholic Diocese of Meru restores degraded lands and protects water catchments. The Full Gospel Churches of Kenya advocates against deforestation and climate change, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church promotes environmental awareness. In Meru County, PCEA engages in water harvesting initiatives, AIC trains farmers in sustainable agriculture, the Redeemed Gospel Church manages recycling programs, and the African Gospel Church advances sanitation programs. However, without embedding creation care in core teachings, these efforts risk lacking the sustained transformative impact envisioned in scripture (Nche, 2019; Rom. 8:19–21).

Key observations from the above experiences

The Church's environmental stewardship is a global mission grounded in theological convictions, notably the biblical mandate of creation care (Gen. 2:15; Ps. 24:1). Through education, advocacy, policy engagement, sustainable agriculture, and community mobilization, churches have advanced environmental awareness. However, gaps persist in embedding ecological sustainability into sermons and worship, limiting the potential for lasting environmentally-conscious behavioural change. Many initiatives remain framed as corporate social responsibility rather than transformative theological imperatives (Nche, 2019).

Globally, churches have adopted energy-efficient measures, such as solar installations, rainwater harvesting, eco-friendly architecture, recycling plants, organic farming, and biodiversity conservation, yet comprehensive integration into doctrine is lacking. Enhanced cross-denominational collaboration, sharing of best practices, and resource exchange could strengthen impact. Extending advocacy beyond church walls through policy engagement, partnerships with environmental organizations, and interfaith dialogue would further amplify influence.

Bridging theological gaps and embedding ecological teachings into worship are essential for sustained, doctrinally grounded leadership. By shifting from sporadic projects to coordinated global action, the Church can advance environmental justice and meaningfully contribute to global environmental sustainability efforts.

4.0 Conclusion

Literature affirms that the Church's environmental stewardship spans global, regional, and local contexts through awareness campaigns, sustainable agriculture, collaborative advocacy, and spiritual teachings, inspiring communities to prioritize creation care (Gen. 2:15). By acknowledging the interconnectedness of environmental issues, the Church advances collective sustainability. However, many initiatives are framed as community service rather than a biblical mandate, limiting environmentally-conscious behavioural transformation. A key gap lies in the inadequate integration of ecological stewardship into sermons and doctrine, creating a "dogmatic gap" that weakens theological grounding. Consequently, environmental advocacy within the Church remains insufficiently embedded in broader religious teachings and practices (Ps. 24:1).

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5.0 Recommendations

The Church should fully integrate environmental stewardship into doctrine and practice, emphasizing the link between spirituality and ecological responsibility to inspire lasting action (Gen. 2:15; Ps. 24:1). Collaborative initiatives among religious institutions in Kenya and beyond are vital, beginning with sensitization forums for clergy to exchange best practices, resources, and strategies. Such efforts can unify denominations in advancing global sustainability, supported by partnerships with environmental advocacy groups. By embracing biblical mandates, the Church wields moral authority to influence environmental policy and leverage collective strengths toward shared protection and sustainability goals (Prov. 12:10).

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