



GUIDE TO CREATING YOUR ECOSIKH 5-YEAR PLAN

Generational changes for a living planet



THE ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION

with the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE)

and support from

United Nations Development Programme



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JUNE 2009. This document is for discussion, inspiration, and future expansion. Please distribute as widely as you wish and keep an eye on EcoSikh's website www.ecosikh.org for the latest version, containing the most up-to-date stories and examples.

Cover image: Libirdy, by Marsha Hollingsworth, Seattle 2009

PREFACE

From HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Founder of ARC.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

I am very pleased to know that ARC, in conjunction with its members, is developing plans for religions to take forward their commitment to care more effectively for the earth's natural environment.

The fact that the majority of the world's faiths ascribe the creation of the world to an all-powerful deity, implies that the leaders and followers of each faith have a moral responsibility for the continued well-being of our planet, and particularly for its natural environment. In recent times it has become apparent that the sheer size of the human population, and its consequent increasing demand for natural resources, are seriously threatening the future health of our planet and the welfare of all life on earth.

I am well aware of the excellent work undertaken by the faith communities ever since the first encounter between conservationists and the leaders of the major faiths at Assisi in Italy, in 1986, but it is only too evident that, in spite of the commendable efforts of the members of ARC, the situation facing us today is even more critical.

I am happy to commend this very important initiative, and I am confident that it will make a significant difference to the quality of life on earth in the long term.

ARC-UN PLANS FOR GENERATIONAL CHANGE

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) was founded by His Royal Highness, the Prince Philip, in 1995. It is a secular body that helps the major religions develop environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. It has now joined with the UNDP to develop a significant, innovative programme to work with the faiths to address issues of climate change and the natural environment through the development of faith based Plans for generational change.

The programme was initially for Seven Year Plans – the number was an acknowledgement that it takes time to formulate plans which will influence action for generations to come. The faiths are not ruled by secular deadlines or project time limits. However, different numbers have different significances for different faiths. The Daoists have created an Eight Year Plan, the Muslims a Seven Year Plan, the Hindus a Nine Year... and the EcoSikh Five Year Plan is part of this wider programme. Please see our website www.arcworld.org for more details.

EcoSikh

Ten years ago, Sikh communities around the world celebrated the inauguration of the Cycle of Creation. The three hundred year long cycle will be a time for Sikhs to reflect upon and celebrate their relationship with the environment and all that Waheguru has provided. The past ten years have borne witness to remarkable steps taken by Sikhs around the globe. Sikhs are leaders in practicing organic and natural farming, building support for recycling programs, and targeting the socio-economic roots that plague the systemic nature of environmental injustice, among other things. Most, if not all of these efforts, share common inspiration that began with the revelations of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and continued through history up to the launch of Bhagat Puran Singh's environmental awareness campaign over fifty years ago and the continued efforts of today's Sikh eco-pioneers.

EcoSikh is an initiative that aims to build on this history and enable Sikh communities around the world to connect their efforts and

work in solidarity with one another. The condition of our planet continues to deteriorate and unsustainable environmental practices are affecting every community worldwide. Punjab is among those areas being hit hardest by unsustainable practices and environmental exploitation, while at the same time hosting some of the best crafted and innovative responses to contemporary ecological crises. We hope that EcoSikh will provide a plan that we can all implement over the next five years to cultivate best practices, inspire on-the-ground activism, address the issues that each of our communities face, and celebrate the ways in which being Sikh is being green.

Interfaith solidarity

The EcoSikh initiative enables the Sikh community to address and reform the ecological problems that affect it most. However, every environmental challenge – no matter where it exists in the world – is connected to all others and dependent on the actions of all. The destruction of the natural environment - including the impact of climate change - is probably the biggest challenge to the welfare of all life on earth. It threatens the survival of all communities and puts the diversity and wonder of nature at risk. The ARC/UNDP Plans for Generational Change Project calls on all faith communities to create long-term action plans, offering practical models of engagement with these great global issues. By working in solidarity with one another across all religious communities, we can address ecological problems in a comprehensive way.

What do we mean by ‘generational change’?

Human behaviour takes generations to change. There are a few examples of sudden shifts but on the whole change is gradual and very often has been inspired, guided and enabled by the work and courage of the faiths.

Many secular groups focus upon the idea of *ethics* as the means by which changes in human behaviour will be affected. However faiths tend to seek the creation of an *ethos*, within which ethical choices are made. Such an ethos is created through the interaction of many different forces – not in isolation from what is going on outside, but in organic interaction with it. These forces range from storytelling to

science; from sacred spaces and their rituals to the mall and market place; from the work of spiritual teachers to that of novelists, playwrights, musicians and screen-writers.

In the 1990s there emerged the idea of investing your money not just by avoiding those companies of whose activities you disapproved (tobacco companies perhaps, or casinos), but by positively supporting those businesses that have the potential to make the world a better place. Today many religiously-based funds follow such a positive investment policy, not because they are told to, but because the ethos is there.

All faiths pass on wisdom, which instils respect for both tradition and heritage. It is from this inheritance that faiths can reflect on the present and see the potential for the future.

Such awareness of our heritage also helps illustrate that we have been through ecological crises like this before, and that we have emerged from them:

- firstly by adapting what we already have,
- secondly by recovering original insights and teachings which have been forgotten or neglected, and
- thirdly by evolving new ways of tackling the problems.

For example Buddhism in Cambodia is today one of the chief forces helping that country pull itself out of the ecological as well as the devastating social disasters caused by years of Civil War.

EcoSikh, therefore, aims to reconnect parts of our rich ecological history central to generations past with our world today. We aspire to support and develop programmes that will shape the behaviour and outlook of Sikhs for generations to come by ensuring that the Sikh tradition of environmental activism remains vibrant and robust. In doing so, we celebrate an important part of Sikh identity while simultaneously addressing the critical needs of the natural environment.

AN INVITATION

This Guidebook is designed to work in tandem with the EcoSikh Seed Plan, which is available at www.ecosikh.org. It provides successful examples from different faith communities around the

world in addition to brainstorming questions to help gurdwaras customize the EcoSikh Seed Plan and meet the needs of its community and local ecosystem.

Our connection to the environment is an integral part of our identity as Sikhs. Thus, EcoSikh is not the project of any one individual, organization, or community, it is something that always has and always will belong to us all. As Sikhs we are called to defend the weak and to uphold justice for all being. We recognize that our natural world is facing new and grave challenges as its resources deplete and we hope that together we may craft a plan to help us answer the call to protect our natural ecology, and to celebrate and prosper as Sikhs through our efforts.

The EcoSikh Seed Plan has been prepared by a small group of Sikh environmentalists and leaders from around the world. None of us claim to speak for all Sikhs or to presume that we have the answers. EcoSikh will only grow if it is adopted and used by communities, families, gurdwaras and individuals and if its ideas lead to action. What we humbly submit is a beginning.

This Guidebook will help you to transform the Seed Plan into something that meets the needs of your gurdwara, celebrates the strengths of your community, and addresses the most critical issues in your natural environment. If there are parts of the Seed Plan that you feel have been left out, we invite you to add them. If there are parts that you feel should be changed, we invite you to change them. Just as there is no single solution for every community, there is no single incarnation of the EcoSikh Plan that will work for everybody. As you and your community customize and personalize your plan, we invite you to share it with everybody on the EcoSikh website. By doing so, the website will become a space where each customized plan can support and inspire others. Each of these Plans will become a tree in the EcoSikh Forest and the product that emerges will be an EcoSikh Plan of true communal ownership.

In addition to the Guidebook, we invite you to visit the EcoSikh website for fresh ideas and postings from other participating gurdwaras.

The results of all these Plans will contribute directly to the Climate Change meeting in Copenhagen at the end of November 2009, which will determine the shape of the next stage of the 'Kyoto Protocol', considered by many to be a crucial event for the future of the planet.

I. THE FIVE KEY AREAS FOR CREATING A SIKH 5-YEAR PLAN

The EcoSikh Seed Plan is focused around five key areas: assets, education, media/advocacy, eco-twinning, and celebration. These key areas provide a framework to help create a comprehensive plan of action and an infrastructure to help connect our efforts around the world. The Guidebook mirrors this structure.

Laying the Foundation

We encourage each gurdwara to create an Environmental Council. The Council will be responsible for customizing an EcoSikh Plan to work best with the local community and its needs. The EcoSikh Seed Plan provides a starting point and this Guidebook provides helpful brainstorming questions and examples to help build upon the Seed Plan and discover which components resonate best with the local community. If possible, the Council will post its customized Plan on the EcoSikh website.

The Council will also be the primary contact in its respective community for the EcoSikh Steering Committee and for gurdwaras who may want to form an eco-twinning partnership.

As you lead discussions to customize the Seed Plan we suggest that you go through each key area, one by one, and to write down all ideas that emerge. You may wish to organize a series of meetings where each meeting focuses on only one key area or you may prefer to organize a daylong workshop where you can discuss them all in the same day. The most important thing is to give you and your community time to think meaningfully about each of these areas and to provide adequate space for many ideas to be brought forth.

Once you have created a Plan, it will be important to create a timeline for its implementation. Include concrete and measurable goals so that you can track your progress. The Council can ensure that the goals are being met and that the Plan is successful.

As you implement your customized Plan, remember that you can always return to the Seed Plan, Guidebook, and EcoSikh website as a tool to refresh and revise.

Where to Begin

To begin we encourage you to look at what is already being done or could be done and then move to suggestions for future developments, which will aid the creation of your EcoSikh Plan.

Mirroring the structure of the EcoSikh Seed Plan, the following pages provide lead questions around the following five key areas complete with stories and examples from around the world:

1. Faith-consistent Use of Assets
2. Education and Young People
3. Media and Advocacy
4. Partnerships and Eco-twinning
5. Celebration

1. Faith-consistent use of assets

The Seed Plan defines assets in a broad way. Assets can be particular skills, professions and time commitments, in addition to land and monetary investments and other types of fiscal support. A large number of Sikhs, in both the Diaspora and South Asia, are leaders in business, engineering, farming, medicine, education, and many other professional fields. Thus as Sikhs we have access to a great array of resources that we can use to improve our ecological practices.

a) Construction Projects and Use of Existing Buildings

There are countless gurdwaras around the world. If you have connections with any of these, have you looked at the environmental impact of any construction activities and decisions? For example to what extent have you assessed the environmental impact of new buildings? What were the key ecological problems and did you find any solutions? What kind of energy are they using?

A mosque that opened in 2008 in Manchester, UK has solar panels, underfloor heating, wood from renewable sources, low energy bulbs and walls built from reclaimed stone. According to a spokesman for Al Markaz Al Najmi mosque, 'the eco-element arises out of what a mosque is meant to be. It is meant to be friendly in every aspect, which includes being friendly to the environment.' A second green mosque in Manchester – with ambient radiant and solar energy technology and with a garden for composting and recycling etc, is currently being designed to run with no external fuel inputs.

In 2008 the Christian Women's Fellowship in Kottayam, Kerala, India set up a snack centre in the middle of their town. It was the first outlet in Kottayam to run on biogas. Set up costs were comparatively high – at 40,000 Rs (around US\$1000) - but they are confident that not only will they make it up within a year from reduced fuel bills, but that they will become an example of environmental excellence and an inspiration to other businesses and households.

c) Land and Forests

To what extent have you examined assets like farmland and forests, mines and quarries under your ownership or management and asked whether they could be differently protected or managed to

better contribute to sustaining our planet? Have you written, or do you have access to a Sikh theology of land, which outlines Sikhism's traditional understanding of land, and its understanding of the land's role in your faith today?

Even if you don't own a forest your faith can make a difference. In 1999 British Sikhs planted a special woodland on the outskirts of Nottingham. Nearly a decade later, Khalsa Wood is a quiet place used for walks, picnics, ceremonies and meditation by many communities – and has become a model example for faith-created woodland around the world. Oak saplings were chosen for their longevity, to be enjoyed by many generations to come; fruit trees too, for their blossom and beauty for today's generation. The initiative came at a time when Sikhs throughout the world were beginning to distribute saplings at traditional ceremonies, in place of the traditional prasad of sweets. (see too the Celebration section)

What role have your sacred places traditionally played in helping preserve habitats for wildlife etc? For example sacred mountains are sanctuaries for many endangered animals; holy water sources – wells, streams, ponds and lakes – can be the last refuge for creatures whose habitats have otherwise been destroyed or polluted.

c) Water

To what extent are you aware of Sikhism's theology of water? And have you incorporated its teachings and wisdom into promoting environmentally responsible irrigation, desalination, showers, gardening, sewerage etc? Where there are rivers and marine environments running through or close to where you live, have you monitored how polluted they are, and if so, have you taken action to reduce that pollution?

The Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions in Bangalore, India, recently conducted laboratory testing into traditional Hindu Ayurvedic teachings, instructing householders to store water in copper pots. Scientists found that e-coli bacteria are killed within 12 hours of being placed into water stored in copper pots. Some four million under-fives die from diarrhoea every year; many from e-coli-related infections. Ancient religious wisdom on water treatment might save some of their lives.

d) Healthcare

Have Sikh medical facilities such as clinics or hospitals made an environmentally sustainable management plan on the use of water, sanitation, cleanliness, provisions, buildings, transport, electricity, reducing waste, reusing materials etc? It can help the planet and – through creating cleaner air – it can directly and immediately help your patients. Have you looked at the sourcing of the food served to patients and visitors – do they accord to natural, vital principles?

e) Food, hospitality and retail outlets

Sikhs serve millions of people each day through langar. How does langar in your community utilize green energy? How can this be improved? Have you looked at your food, hospitality and retail outlets to see if your sourcing is ethically and ecologically sound and that you are using green energy if this is workable? Have you asked the catering companies you might recommend what their sourcing policies are? Improvements might involve introducing more Fairtrade and organic goods, and recommending free range. The UK's largest organic trademark organisation, the Soil Association, recommends the 70-50-30 principle, which states that a realistic ration for ethical food sourcing (whether in teashops, restaurants, school dinners or in your own homes) is

- * 70 percent fresh,
- * 50 percent local, and
- * 30 percent organic.

Each country is different, but this is a good first point of discussion.

In 2005 the managers of the Methodist International Centre – which combines a boutique hotel in London with hostel accommodation for students from around the world – was asked a simple question: why aren't your eggs free range? This led to internal discussions about living one's ethics, and the Centre is now working to become a model of ethical and environmentally conscious sourcing.

f) Financial Investments and Micro-Finance

How fully have you examined your own financial assets and to what degree do you practice faith-consistent investment i.e. considering the *positive* ethical, social and environmental issues as well as the negative ones? How have you accomplished your investment goals? What kinds of projects worked well or poorly?

Microfinance initiatives represent one of the greatest movements for positive social change over the past 30 years - providing affordable credit to the poor. Among them are the Ecumenical Church Loan Funds set up after World War II to rebuild churches; later they were extended to grant loans for small-scale income-generating projects, and today their main activity is lending to small and social businesses in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, including loans for ecological farm products and environmentally friendly water filtration systems. Link to www.eclof.org

g) Pilgrimage and Tourism

Every year millions of people go on pilgrimage to our holy sites in Punjab. They are also responsible, in terms of pilgrimage, for much of the “tourist” travel in South Asia. Have you looked at your role in tourism and pilgrimage and asked if there might be more environmentally friendly ways to do this? Have you thought about how many pilgrims now travel by plane, coach and car where previously they walked, and considered ways of lessening the environmental impact of this? What is the situation in Amritsar and Anandpur Sahib? Are pilgrims encouraged to tread lightly on the earth?

The ancient Hindu pilgrimage path around the shrines of the god Krishna at Vrindavan in India passes through forests dedicated to various moments in Lord Krishna’s life. However, until recently these ‘forests’ were little more than a few old trees. Now the Hindu temples at Vrindavan have a programme of tree nurseries and replanting to bring the forests of the gods back to life.

h) Purchasing Power

Are there areas where you and your gurdwara can use your joint purchasing power to help the environment?

In 2004 Jewish eco-organisation Hazon launched a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) Programme - it involves a synagogue entering a partnership with a local organic farmer, and committing to pre-purchase a share of the season’s produce. For the farmer this guarantees a market, for members this gives access to fresh, organic produce at affordable prices. By early 2009 there were 32 locations in the US and Israel, putting more than US\$1 million of Jewish

purchasing power behind organic farms. In 2008, these sites donated more than 800 kgs (17,900 lbs) to local food shelters.

In 2000, the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church in the US launched an initiative to eliminate chlorine in paper products used by the. United Methodist Women in 34 states visited Kinko's stores to request processed chlorine-free (PCF). At that time only 66 percent had PCF paper at all, staff were badly informed, and there was a surcharge. Within months, the shop had eliminated the price differential, and had agreed to stock PCF paper in every store. The United Methodists Women's Division has around a million members.

2. Education and young people

Some 50 percent of educational institutions around the world are founded, managed, or associated with faith institutions.

a) School Curricula

What potential is there in your educational work for incorporating more in-depth, and Sikh-consistent teachings about the environment into the curriculum? Do you, or can you, have vegetable patches where you teach pupils how to grow food? Do you look at and promote preparation of food grown without pesticides? Or go into nature to paint and study birds and wild plants, to help young people appreciate their beauty?

The Academy of St Francis of Assisi in Liverpool, UK, is a joint Anglican/Roman Catholic State-supported school that has the environment and a commitment to sustainable ways of living as its specialism. It features a solar atrium which produces some of its energy as well as furniture made from recycled materials. More importantly, the environment is integral the curriculum, with pupils caring for gardens, with maths classes calculating the materials for their own patch, and geography classes studying the soil and deciding what would flourish. It was built in 2005 on the site of a disused rubbish tip, in one of the poorer parts of the city, and already parents are queuing for places. The Academy is also open to students of neighbouring schools wanting to attend environment courses. Are there Sikh schools that could follow this example?

b) School Buildings and Grounds

What potential is there in your educational work for making sure that all new buildings and extensions are rigorous in their attention to environmental details, and that any playing fields and gardens pay attention to the needs of wild flora and fauna as well as children?

In September 2008, the UK's first Hindu Voluntary Aided State School opened in north London. It hopes to become a model not just for education but for environmental awareness. Helping students "adopt conscientious lifestyles that help sustain our planet, particularly by setting a practical example, nurturing respect for all life and maintaining a simple, clean and ecologically-friendly environment" is one of the six ideals of the Krishna-Avanti primary school. The school has solar panels, grass on the roof to keep heat in the buildings, and compact but beautiful grounds to promote growing vegetables and teaching outdoors when weather permits, which is a key part of Hindu education.

b) Conservation and Recycling Policy

Do you have policies of water and energy conservation for your educational buildings? What do you do about paper, food, sewage and other waste? Do you encourage children to walk, cycle or take public transport to school?

c) Youth Organisations and Camps

Do you have youth organisations where environmental ideas could also be integrated - for example through running youth camps in nature, organising street cleaning projects, and forest schools?

Since 1994 Syndesmos, the worldwide Orthodox Youth Organisation, has organised an ecological project on Mt Athos - the centre of Orthodox Christian monasticism. Volunteers work for 10 days to clean refuse off the beaches and walkways, clear cobble paths, plant trees and help in the orchards. It is hoped the scheme will be expanded to other monasteries.

In 2000 the Maronite Church in Lebanon made its portion of the fragile Harissa forest into a Maronite-Protected Area. The town of Jounieh and several major landowners all voluntarily joined the scheme, losing themselves the chance of considerable money being offered by developers. When asked

why he had made that decision, one of the landowners said that he remembered back to when he was a boy, and had gone for a camping holiday in the forest, organised by the church. “It was one of the happiest times of my life,” he said. “That’s why I want to protect the forest now.”

d) Environmental Monitoring

As part of life’s education, could you work with the natural curiosity, expertise and grassroots outreach of your gurdwara to organise environmental monitoring of the world around them? Sometimes it is only through compassionate mindfulness and systematic observation that scientific details will be collected, that rivers and eco-systems will be monitored for flora, fauna and pollution, and that early action can therefore be taken. If there are places that your gurdwara values, perhaps because they are beautiful, perhaps simply because they *are*, then you are in a wonderful situation to watch over and protect them.

The Catholic Bishops of the dioceses that span the Columbia River along the western seaboard of the USA realised in the 1980s that their precious waterway was becoming polluted. They encouraged their faithful to monitor the river, along its length, and then fed that information back at all levels to the state government, to the polluting companies and to the communities through letters, education, advocacy and influence. The river is now cleaner.

e) Training

How do you train your granthis and gurdwara leaders on environmental issues? Could the training curriculum for your granthis be ‘greened’?

f) Prayer:

Can your study of the scriptures, and your prayer and practice be developed in line with Sikh theology to include your values of treading lightly on the earth and judging people by how they behave, not by what they own?

When asked what Buddhists should do in response to climate change, Buddhist teacher Thrangu Rinpoche said they should do two things. First they should inform themselves about how things are, to know what practical steps to take. And second they should make aspiration prayers to the Buddha. Perhaps

that will not stop global warming directly, he said, “but it will gradually help to transform our minds, and *then* we will make efforts to help the situation”.

g) Theology of Nature, Land, Forests, Water etc.

Sikhism has developed a statement about its relationship with nature. And the Guru Granth Sahib Ji has many inspiring quotations about nature. However, have you read them? Can you find them? Publicise them? Quote from them? Used them in your schools? Make them easily available on your website? See Appendix 1 for some of the many inspiring quotes from the Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikh Statement can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/ksc8yn>. Other materials can also be found on the EcoSikh website.

h) Stories and Practices

Are there any stories or half-forgotten traditional practices that highlight how Sikhism has always cared for creation/the natural environment, and can these be revived?

Parsees in Mumbai have recently begun to retell, a traditional story of how, once upon a time, Mother Earth was in trouble. She asked God – Ahura Mazda – if He could send her a prince, with warriors, to use force to stop the people from hurting her. But Ahura Mazda said he could not. Instead he would send Her a holy man, to stop the people from hurting her, using words and inspirational ideas. And thus was born the prophet, Zoroaster. Also, the Zoroastrians used to have a tradition of building houses with reservoirs under them into which all rain water was directed in order to ensure the best use of water, and keep homes cool. Perhaps some cutting-edge Zoroastrian architects can work out how to start building like that again. Are there any Sikh traditions and stories that can be revived?

i) Traditions of Simple Living

Are you encouraging children to live more simply and in harmony with the environment? If so, how are you supporting and assisting them? If not, then could this be a key area for development in your EcoSikh Plan?

Jain youth organisations have long encouraged their members to advocate simple, non-meat diets. They believe this would not only reduce the negative karmic effects caused by the suffering resulting from killing animals on such a large scale,

but would also improve the earth ecologically, by reducing the grain needed to fatten livestock and the greenhouse gases emitted by cattle fed unnaturally on grain.

3. Media and advocacy

The EcoSikh website serves as the hub of our media and advocacy efforts. Because our mission is to connect the work that is already being done; to facilitate the ways in which individuals and communities can adopt and customize their own EcoSikh Plan; and to inspire people and communities with ideas from participants around the world, the website will become a robust place for sharing and creativity.

One of the best ways to become environmentally active in your own community and to help advance the EcoSikh initiative, is to create your own media and advocacy strategy. Perhaps your community already has a website or would like to create one dedicated to your environmental work. These may be connected to the EcoSikh website to help inspire others.

Perhaps your community may be able to push things in new directions and serve as a leader for the larger EcoSikh media and advocacy work. These points will help you develop your strategy:

a) Subject Matter

To what extent are your media outlets engaging in these issues? Do your newsletters, radios, newspapers, TV stations, websites etc have special sections on ecology? Are they using their editorial authority to promote simpler living, and looking after the natural environment with more care? Could your website have a special section, blog, picture galleries etc on the development of your EcoSikh Plan?

b) Influence

How do you influence your government on its environmental priorities? What extra influence could you wield? Do you have media access to national broadcasting networks where you could raise these issues in, for example, a weekly religious affairs programme?

Baha'i communities have used their local radio stations in South America, which broadcast in local languages, to pass on environmental ideas and information on a weekly basis.

c) Advocacy

Now that you are active, you are in a position to ask others to be active as well and take these issues as seriously as you do. Could you lobby your politicians – whether local, national or regional – as well as your directors, head teachers, and religious leaders to help stop climate change and the destruction of the natural environment

In 2007 some 1,400 street demonstrations organised by congregations, campuses and citizen activists in all 50 States of the USA demanded that the US Congress cut carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050. The Step It Up Campaign, run as a grassroots activist network, and working with faith, interfaith and secular organisations including the US National Council of Churches, was a key network responsible for this activity and awareness. Recently, the team launched a new campaign called 350.org. See section 7: Celebrations for more details.

d) Guides and Handbooks

Could you draw together, from your audits and educational materials, guides or handbooks (on paper, on the web, on mobile phones or on audio or video) for the Sikh faithful on how to live more simply and environmentally - with practical suggestions? How could these be developed through your publishing houses or websites?

The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences have created one such guidebook:
<http://tinyurl.com/lxo2ob>

e) Materials

What more could your media – your newspapers, newsletters, radio stations, websites and printers of your holy books, pamphlets and brochures – do to protect the natural environment in terms of the materials they use, e.g environmentally friendly paper and ink? If you have publishing houses have you examined their impact on the environment? Could you sometimes provide web content instead of paper publishing, for example?

Thomas Nelson in the USA issued the first FSC paper Bible in 2007. Several other publishing companies are now considering printing only on environmentally friendly paper. The Bible is the most printed and widely distributed book in the world. In 2005 some 125 million New Testaments and 72 million full

Bibles were printed and sold. So an environmental strategy in printing and distribution could have a powerful impact.

The Benedictines have produced *Listening to the Earth* – a handbook for their monasteries in Latin America – explaining theologically and practically how to take action on environmental issues. The text can be found on ARC’s website, in English, Portuguese and Spanish.

4. Partnerships and Eco-twinning

Eco-twinning enables the development of long-lasting relationships of mutual benefit between communities in two distinct places. We believe this practice will function especially well between gurdwaras in the Diaspora and those in South Asia. The educational exchanges that can occur from such connections provide invaluable ways for people to learn about the different environmental issues that communities are facing in very different parts of the world. Schools in both places would be encouraged to tailor their environmental lessons around what they learn from each other’s communities and their environmental concerns and passions.

The partnerships will provide an easy way to strengthen Diaspora youth’s ties to cultural traditions in India. For those in India, the connection may help a gurdwara secure the resources it needs to take the next steps in its eco-plan.

The EcoSikh website will a directory of gurdwaras interested in participating.

How can your community contribute and benefit from an eco-twinning program?

a) Eco-twinning

Do you have existing links or twinings with other groups in different parts of the world or elsewhere in South Asia? If *you* are in a place that is experiencing climate change at a critical level then have you thought about bringing that into your twinning relationship? See both ARC and EcoSikh’s website on eco-twinning for more details and ideas.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania has requested a link with churches in the global north to set up a tree planting project in that country.

Could your youth groups and/or members of your diaspora community think about 'eco-twinning' with environment projects where the effects of climate change are being felt first hand? Could this twinning use Sikh expertise on the internet to make these links work through the internet?

St Joseph's Catholic School in Swindon, UK, was rebuilt entirely in 2006. As part of the rebuilding, the school made a link to a severely under-funded school in Uganda, and has been helping it with its own construction work. The materials, needs and finances are different in the two countries, but both schools have benefited from the collaboration and discussions of the shared concern they have to educate young people and be environmentally responsible.

b) Lay people

Have you tried to involve lay people who are active in environmental fields to help you develop appropriate ecological responses to issues? Lay people often want to contribute but no-one asks them to do so. In your Environmental Council try to include Sikhs who are specialists in different fields related to the environment – law, water management, land management, education, waste management etc. The Environmental Council will not only offer you the most professional advice; it can also link your programmes into the wider work of local, national or international agencies and governments, and mean that your own efforts are multiplied, or leveraged.

The Board of Deputies of British Judaism established an environment group which drew together some of the greatest minds and most professional environmentalists in the UK. They had never before been asked to think about how their faith shaped their work or how their work could shape their faith. It led to many new initiatives throughout the UK.

c) Other Partnerships

Look around and see who might partner with you because they share the same interest in organic farming, clean energy usage, recycling etc. There is no need always to reinvent the wheel. Have you made links with secular bodies that are working, environmentally, in the

field? Have you made links with other faith bodies in your region that are interested in improving their environmental impact? Are there areas where you can share expertise and experience and avoid duplication? Are there any commercial groups involved in the environment who would work with you, and who might give you a significant discount because you would give their product a greater profile?

When the Church of South India decided to hold a conference on faith and the environment in February 2008 they linked with many other Christian traditions in the area. The event was attended extensively by seminarians from the Syrian tradition, by Catholics, as well as by many Hindus.

Interfaith Power and Light in the US is an interfaith ministry, which aims to: “mobilize a national religious response to global warming while promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation”. It began as Episcopal Power and Light in 1998 but found there was strength in numbers. It now covers 4000 congregations and faith communities in 28 states.

5. Celebration

Because environmental activism is an expression of our faith, we understand the entire EcoSikh initiative to be a celebration. The EcoSikh Seed Plan has suggested some ways in which we can coordinate this celebration around the life of Guru Har Rai Ji and the season of Basant. Does your gurdwara have other ideas? Ideas that can either expand upon the Seed Plan’s or operate independently?

a) Traditional Festivals

Have you already set aside a specific festival to focus on the natural environment? What existing festival or custom could be used to deepen our environmental practice?

In Judaism, the festival of Tu B’Sabat – the New Year of Trees – has become a major environmental festival with education kits, new prayers and projects helping to mobilise Judaism every year. Meanwhile the day of mourning – Tisha B’Av – marked every summer to mark the destruction of the two ancient Holy Temples in Jerusalem, has been extended in

some Jewish traditions as a lament for the destruction of the earth.

The Jain festival of Paryushana is a time of reflection and meditation on the actions of the past year. It is marked by observing the cardinal virtues of forgiveness, charity, simplicity, contentment, truthfulness, self-restraint, fasting, detachment, humility and continence - and some Jains are increasingly seeing it as a festival of reflection on our actions to the natural environment, and the consequences of that. In 2008 the Mumbai Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation decided to close down all city slaughterhouses during the nine-day period (from August 27 to September 3).

c) Introduce new traditions and create a platform

Many religious leaders value tradition so much that they have no hesitation in introducing new ones. Many faiths are expert at bringing people together and their places of worship are often wonderful buildings for holding forums for events. Open up your gurdwara for a party or fete on environmental issues; create a forum for debate; issue an invitation to people in your wider community inviting them to come and tell their story. How can your community use its particular strengths to celebrate in similar style?

The Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania now has a programme of tree planting linked to key life events. For example, trees are presented to children at their baptism, for their parents to plant. Those children in turn must plant a number of their own trees before they can be confirmed.

d) Celebrate beautiful places and new developments

Sometimes it is the role of faiths, within all the doom and gloom of ecological predictions, to remind people to celebrate the beautiful, good, heroic and brave things about the world and about life. Celebrate good new developments, the potential for better protection of habitats and eco-systems, and give thanks. How can your community mark each special occasion by honouring the environment?

II. WHAT NEXT?

Once you have created your customized EcoSikh Plan we encourage you to create a timeline for its implementation. Include concrete and measurable goals so that you can track your progress. Your gurdwara's Environmental Council can ensure that the goals are being met and that the Plan is successful.

As you implement your customized Plan, remember that you can always return to the Seed Plan, Guidebook, and EcoSikh website as a tool to refresh and revise.

We invite you to share your EcoSikh Plan on the EcoSikh website. By doing so, your Plan will become a tree in the EcoSikh Forest and will help support and inspire other communities.

The EcoSikh initiative and its collection of EcoSikh Plans will take many different shapes as it is taken up by different communities in different countries. What we are interested in is the shape that makes best sense for you and your gurdwara. Be adventurous but also think about how you will fund, manage and sustain this plan – not only over the five years that it will probably take to initiate new ways of doing things, but over the following generations as well, when the changes in ethos will really start being seen and felt. To what extent can you build this into existing jobs, staffing or structures? Will you need to appoint or recruit new people to manage this? Can you tell the story through video or pictures or paintings or stories?

Link here for the latest news on the EcoSikh initiative:

<http://www.ecosikh.org>

Link here for the latest news on all the Plans for Generational Change Project

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=27>

III. RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

EcoSikh

Website: www.ecosikh.org

Email: info@ecosikh.org

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)

The House
Kelston Park
Bath
BA1 9AE
United Kingdom
Tel: 01225 758004
E-mail: info@arcworld.org
Website: www.arcworld.org

The Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE)
2446 Reedie Dr., Suite 14
Silver Spring, MD 20902
USA
Tel: +1-301-946-2800
Email: info@sikhcouncilusa.org
Website: www.sikhcouncilusa.org

APPENDIX I: QUOTATIONS FROM THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Guru Nanak describes: "hundreds of thousands of worlds beneath and over ours." (3))

"True are Your Universes, and true are your solar systems, True are Your Worlds and true Your Creation, True are Your doings and all deliberations, True is Your order and true Your courts." (438)

"Through countless ages Complete darkness prevailed;
In a complete void There was no world, no firmament.
The Will of the Lord alone existed
Neither night nor day, neither sun nor moon;
Only God in an endless trance.
Neither creation, nor destruction, neither coming nor going;
There were no continents, no underworlds;
No seven oceans, no rivers, no flowing waters;
There were no higher, middle or lower planes;
Neither was there heaven, nor hell;
Neither death nor time;
There was no world of tortures, nor region of bliss;
Neither birth nor death;
When He so willed,
Then He created the world and without any support sustained the
firmament. He founded the continents, solar systems, underworld, and from
the Absolute Self, he became manifest.

None knows his limit, It is through the True Teacher (Guru) the secret is revealed." (1035)

"The forms become in according to Divine Will. Human comprehension fails at this stage to understand the Divine Will". (1)

"The air is deemed to be Guru, Water the father and the Earth our mother,
Whose belly gives us all the things.
Night and day are the two female and male nurses.
Made to play thus, the world plays in their lap.
You Yourself are the fish and yourself the net.
You Yourself are the cow and the grazer
Your light pervades in all the beings of the world just as lord has willed."
(1021)

"All nights all days all dates all occasions
All seasons, months, the entire Earth and all its load.
All Waters all winds, all the fires and underworlds.
All spheres, all divisions of Earth, and all worlds, men and forms.
How great is the Lord's command over them all cannot be known
Nor can the Lord's deeds be described."