Cooperation for Healing the Planet, from Professionals and Communities of Religious Faith

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It is common for more modern, educated people to lack appreciation that religious cultures play essential roles in preserving natural features. Examples of faith-based stewardship of lands and waters reveal moral commitments going beyond selfish and material interests. Rural peoples who have long-time connection to nature possess valuable indigenous understanding. In many cases, the local communities have potential for major contributions in sustaining earth’s life-support systems. Also, because so many traditional communities lack political and economic power, in order to serve the needs of their environment, they require partnerships with entities trained in the expertise of (geo)sciences, wisely employed.

Partnerships of grassroots religious people and faith-inspired science practitioners have accomplished significant benefits for humanity and the greater natural systems. This has been and can be accomplished at low financial cost and with low-tech methods. The “supernaturally” motivated will reach out where larger governmental, commercial, and academic-technical forces have little interest. An adage that applies to this type of service is, we labor not with guaranteed success but in being faithful to our deepest calling.

A prime example of Faith-Geoscience partnership multiplied at small-scale, is the continuing effort of Youth With A Mission (YWAM), using volunteer water, sanitation, soils, land-use, and mineral-resource experts. A key factor in conducting successful rural projects, is YWAM’s many established international ministry bases. These serve as hubs for outreach to local communities. Each base is maintained by local, indigenous faith leaders working with and for their communities. Many bases are rural but some are also in the midst of densely-populated cities. The communities with base leadership identify critical environmental issues and then seek the help of identified geoscientists to come, survey each issue, help training to gain local expertise, plan-design in full cooperation with vested parties, and then help, but not perform all the effort for solutions. YWAM and its professional volunteers are predominantly Christian, but they operate with a healthy cooperation among those of many other faiths.
Examples of YWAM-based projects, mostly involving their affiliate Water for Life and Wheaton College (IL) Geology Department, include 1) solid and septic sanitation for the Pellrus Township, RSA; 2) land-use GIS analysis for water resource distribution and earth-materials assessment for the YWAM Kilimanjaro Base, Tanzania; and 3) long-term household water-sanitation and soils improvements for villages in Kosovo. These are only a few of the grassroots collaborations that continue to utilize professional earth-science expertise in service of the global poor, motivated by the spirit of religious commitment.