



Roots of Hopes

Q&A on Caritas' tree planting initiative within the framework of CI's "Together We" campaign

Global Awareness Week, 13-19 October 2022

What's the underlying issue?

One of the foremost issues concerning environmental degradation is that our societies are contributing to release greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide (CO₂), that are warming the Earth's climate to levels we have never experienced before. As a result, issues as diverse as sea-level rise and extreme weather events, like hurricanes and droughts, are becoming more severe and disrupting people's vulnerability and livelihoods.

Planting trees has been chosen as a common gesture for Caritas groups willing to do it in their communities, as they pull in carbon dioxide (CO₂) through their leaves, which they use to grow. So long as a tree lives, that carbon stays within it – and trees can live for decades or centuries. Planting trees is said to be one of the most effective carbon-curbing solutions within reach of virtually anyone. They can be planted in regions that have been deforested (reforestation) or in places that have never had them before (afforestation).

However, the benefits of planting a tree go far beyond a merely biological function...

What's the significance of planting trees?

Tree planting has the potential to yield not only environmental but also, and perhaps mostly, social and spiritual benefits, both long and short term. These benefits are relevant to the growth of human communities, some of which are summarised as follows:

- In the Bible, trees represent life (e.g. Tree of Life in Genesis 2), growth (e.g. we grow in resilience and strength throughout our lifetime), provision (e.g. trees produce fruit and seeds that are made for us to eat and enjoy), beauty (e.g. trees feature heavily in Christian art) and God's family, as trees symbolise how we are all connected to a common root;

- Planting trees can be a triple win, providing livelihoods, absorbing and locking away planet-warming carbon dioxide and improving the health of ecosystems; it also helps in giving off oxygen that people need to breathe;
- From a social point of view, planting trees encourages individuals and communities to connect with their environment; in return, it promotes social ties and community, reduces stress and encourages physical activity;
- In our food supply chains, trees provide sustenance for all human communities, as well as protection and homes for many creatures that are essential to our ecosystems;
- As extreme weather conditions increase, trees reduce the amount of storm water runoff, which in turn reduces erosion and pollution in our waterways; their presence also reduces the effects of flooding in regions where communities regularly experience extreme precipitation and flood events;
- From an advocacy point of view, the benefits that trees provide can help cities and countries meet many internationally supported United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

How to do it in a context-adequate way?

People and communities willing to take part in this year's Global Awareness Week by planting a tree in their community are encouraged to do it together with others and by selecting context-adequate saplings / seeds with a potential to grow in the areas they are placed in. When making plans for your activity, please:

- Make sure you plant the right tree in the right place: planting the wrong trees in the wrong place may lead to the unwanted, opposite effect of reducing biodiversity, speeding extinctions and making ecosystems less resilient;
- Make a commitment to take care of the tree(s) you have planted with members from your community over a sustained period of time; send photos and stories around your tree planting activity to CI's Global Campaigns Manager Alfonso Apicella at apicella@caritas.va featuring the Caritas logo and the people you do it with;
- Document the growth of your tree(s) more extensively by sharing your experience of integral ecology in your community and showing progress made on social media in order to inspire others to follow suit;
- Include the "Together We" campaign hashtag #TogetherWe along with @iamCaritas so as to generate more traffic and increase our collective visibility;

- As a community building gesture, people are encouraged to organise their tree planting activity by including a short opening prayer, which they can choose from a selection of different resources available in the Global Awareness Week toolkit;
- If you feel that your current activities do not or cannot exactly align with this activity, fear not, as there is plenty of room for flexibility. You are most welcome to share stories about your current work on *related* activities, including but not limited to:
 - o Community work in landscape restoration;
 - o Awareness raising of deforestation and land degradation;
 - o School gardening projects;
 - o Awareness raising around the role of vegetation in sustainable, integral human development;
 - o Collecting reflections or visual representations (drawings, photos, etc.) around what trees symbolise in different contexts and for whom;
 - o Joining in prayer with your community around the ‘roots of hopes’ people pin on integral ecology and send us any pastoral resources you’ve found particularly inspiring.
- Lastly, if you’re in a Caritas youth group, you may have heard that World Youth Day (WYD) pilgrims from all over the world have been invited to take on a global tree planting challenge¹ in the lead-up to WYD Lisbon 2023, which aims to alert about biodiversity, climate change and their effects on people and planet. On the occasion of WYD in Lisbon next year, you can invite your youth group to plant trees in your community until August 2023 to offset part of the environmental footprint and celebrate universal brotherhood for a more sustainable planet. Please connect with CI Officer Promoting Youth Leadership Rebecca Rathbone at rathbone@caritas.va if you’re from a youth group and would like to get involved.

Thank you for helping us disseminate information about this initiative, and we very much look forward to putting down roots of hopes, creative solidarity, knowledge and understanding, growing in resilience together as one!

¹ <https://www.lisboa2023.org/en/article/wyd-lisbon-2023-challenges-pilgrims-to-plant-trees-worldwide>