

### **What FLEAT Does to a Young, African Believer**

The Faith Leaders' Environmental Advocacy Training (FLEAT) offered by the South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) transforms pan Africanism and faith into amalgamable companions with science in the service to the Kingdom of God here on Earth.

When the letter from Zainab Adams, the SAFCEI Programs Assistant, offering me a place at the FLEAT, I beamed with the joy of experiencing Cape Town and meeting with other people in a formal training on care of creation. I am a computer scientist by training and was the least concerned about the environment until I joined the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability (CYNESIA) in 2013. Granted the new challenge to acquire as much knowledge as possible on environmental care, the FLEAT was the first formal training I would receive without having to pay a dime! All I needed was to show up and with an open mind.

The first round of the FLEAT conducted in Constantia, Cape Town would prove an experience



*During the Nuke Vigil outside the South African National Assembly*

that I never expected. In two days, I undertook a course that I still believe would take a university at least a semester to deliver adequate content that inspires action right away. I particularly recall the lessons on how to do press releases and use social media to stir

conversations and steer action from faith leaders. Besides the formal lessons, the FLEAT offered me an opportunity to engage with the real world of eco-justice advocacy through a vigil outside the South African National Assembly. In my short life, I had never taken part in any on-street protest against or even for anything, save for the way of the cross on Good Fridays.

The second round of the FLEAT was in Lusaka, Zambia and the beauty of the diverse settings was simply outstanding. This round brought together two FLEAT teams including the



team that had had their first round in Cape Town in 2015. The opportunity to present what our organisations were doing since the last FLEAT while in Lusaka also proved worthwhile for CYNESA in terms of keeping account and reflecting on activities we had engaged in. The skills gained during the FLEAT inspired me to engage my local parish priest on the possibility of engaging the faithful in an eco-conversion. Whereas talks are still ongoing, I have learnt that at times bottom-up approaches are more effective where urgent need for change is requisite. Through the proactive skills gained from the FLEAT, I now engage in 101 behaviour change advocacies and this have borne fruit. For example, I have seen my wife take initiative to carry a shopping basket to the supermarket to avert the use of plastic bags at the risk of being laughed at and being stigmatised for being ‘backward’. Our two sons (4 and 5) no longer leave the lights on in the house or the tap running for no reason because they know that God is not happy with such carefree attitude in the house.

During the third round, the unforgettable experience at the FLEAT was at Fatma Zahra (A.S.)



College in Harare, Zimbabwe where we attended a field visit. The wealth of knowledge concerning environmental justice and care that the students presented with during the visit was astounding and left me with the “I Thought I Knew!” kind of challenging thought. This triggered a new inspiration into the instrumental role students that CYNESA is working with on developing a climate change toolkit for high school youth in Jesuit institutions in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe will be in content development.

When a young, African believer graduates from the FLEAT programme by SAFCEI, the experience transforms him/her into a Faith Leader with the capacity to undertake Environmental Advocacy in whatever context. From the theory, practice, and simulation of situations to the development of a network of faith leaders across Africa is simply divine. We, at CYNESA, hope to partner with SAFCEI in bringing the FLEAT to more young people in Africa on an ongoing basis.

By

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