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**CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE**  
TRACEY DEGRAAF

“Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food. And it was so” (Genesis 1:29).

Everything we do in international



development is about protecting and nurturing resources for the sake of people. Agricultural programs, livestock programs, clean water sources, and protecting the environment in which we live, are all core programs to any work in the fight against abject poverty. Protecting and nurturing our natural resources equates to a healthy human development. This quarter's edition of "Excellence @ Work" profiles the innovative and important work that member agencies are

undertaking in the area of environmental protection across the world. Please take note, the very first article profiles a new CCRDA member: Plateau Perspectives. Take a look, and don't miss an opportunity to call them up and personally welcome them into the CCRDA network. I'm sure they have a lot of knowledge to offer others within the niche of environmental protection.

As this is our final edition for 2014, on behalf of the Board of CCRDA, I would like to wish you all Christ's blessings for the season, and say that we look forward to seeing you again at the AGM/Spring Forum in 2015.

Sincerely,  
Tracey DeGraaf



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## CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF SEMI-NOMADIC PEOPLES DR. J MARC FOGGIN, PLATEAU PERSPECTIVES



The Tibetan plateau in western China and the surrounding mountain regions of Central Asia constitute the source areas, or headwaters, of the life-giving streams and major rivers that are essential for many millions of people downstream. Water flowing from the Tibetan plateau alone serves nearly 40 percent of the world's population. However as the climate changes, as grasslands of the plateau desiccate, as its glaciers melt – water availability in China and in South and Southeast Asia, fed by rivers that originate in the highlands, will decrease and become less reliable. In the grassland and mountain regions over 3,000 metres above sea level, where most Tibetan herders live, environmental changes are already dramatic. Outside the polar regions, it is here that rapid warming and other aspects of global climate change are most pronounced worldwide.

Under climatic stress and with less reliable water regimes than before, the vast grasslands of the Tibetan plateau continue to degrade – and both the environment and the people whose livelihoods depend on it suffer. As socio-ecological systems, however, solutions must derive from a recognition that both people and place (indeed all of biodiversity) are valuable and worthy of our appreciation and concern. Thus any action that promotes good ecological function in grasslands, for example, will help to improve people's livelihoods as well as capture and sequester or 'hold on to' carbon, and thus even decrease the rate of climate change. Some of the best sustainable solutions globally have included the empowerment of local communities, who generally subsist on the basis of small-scale agricultural livelihoods.

[Plateau Perspectives](#) is an international non-profit organization that has promoted environmental protection and community development in China since 1998. We have focused on the Sanjiangyuan region (i.e., in the headwaters of the Yangtze, Yellow and Mekong rivers) for more than a decade, a region widely known as the 'water tower of Asia'. During this time, many development policies and environmental initiatives have been introduced; but environmental degradation, often due more to climate change than to overgrazing, has consistently remained a growing concern. The state (and fate) of local people's livelihoods and their quality of life have also gained increasing attention, inter-linked with the state of their environment.

While our community development work has included important aspects of education and the provision of health care, focusing on special needs of dispersed populations and pastoralist livelihoods, another of our distinctive features has been adoption of a broad, integrated 'systems thinking' approach – which led us from early on to respond to, and incorporate, local and regional conservation agendas, as well. In response to local community request, we supported and helped strengthen local 'community conserved areas' that sought to protect snow leopard, wild yak, Tibetan antelope, black-necked cranes and other endangered wildlife species; and through this experience, we together pioneered the development of a new approach (in this part of the world) for environmental conservation, 'community co-management.' A complementary tool for community-based conservation and development has been the establishment of village herders' cooperatives, which in turn provided good platforms for the launch of community ecotourism ventures! Not least, these forms of community empowerment have now been incorporated into national strategies, through the development of the protected area system in the province where we have worked these past several years. Community resilience to change, whether due to globalisation or to climate change, has been enhanced through our integrated systems approach to development.

Supporting the development of community-based cooperatives and associations, business opportunities such as ecotourism, or otherwise responding to community requests and felt needs – whether this be in matters of mother and child health or conserving special habitats and

partnering with nature reserves – Plateau Perspectives has explicitly sought to base its actions on local situations rather than preconceived ideas, and is committed to ‘take the time necessary’ to develop relationships, to listen and learn.

One key lesson we have learned is that many of our community partners already know that our Christian mandate to love our neighbours and to care for creation are generally supportive and reinforcing. In the light of major disruptions around the world, including climate change (and environmental degradation in general) and unjust economic systems, the global Christian community should think further how it may support and strengthen local communities to better respond and adapt to such threats ... as well as deal with their root causes, which often lie even closer to home. As expressed to us on several occasions, our concern and love for the people with whom we have partnered for many years has been recognized to a large degree through joining with them in stewarding the environment (including wildlife protection) and through socio-economic development interventions, thus participating in and reflecting the Lord's love for all of His creation.

*Marc Foggin is a conservation biologist who, together with his wife Marion (a community health paediatrician) since 2000, has lived and worked on the Tibetan Plateau for over 15 years. They now live and work in Kyrgyzstan, still involved in the same kind of work: that of bringing together the care of creation with the empowerment and development of local herding communities.*

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**MORE THAN GRASS FOR MR. GUDETO**  
MIKE PRINS, FH CANADA



Grass can be like gold in Sasiga, Ethiopia.

Mr. Gudeto Sirna is a 45 year old farmer and father to five children. He and his wife, Beshatu, live in Baredu Belo village in the Sasiga region of Ethiopia, on about two hectares of farm land. The land lost its productivity due to many years of tillage. They struggled to produce enough to feed their family, much less sell to pay for school. Their hut was small, old, and leaked during the rainy season.

Meanwhile, the village had been clear-cutting their area to use the clippings as fuel, to make room for more houses, and to add to their farm land. However, it was done hastily, and soil erosion resulted due to wind and rain runoff that in turn made the land unproductive. Environmental degradation was taking its toll.

This kind of mistreatment of the land had become common practice in their village. It's what Mr. Gudeto and his neighbours knew - it was how it had always been done, but they knew it wasn't working.

The farmers partnered with FH to explore new methods in "redemptive agriculture." FH trainers focus on practices that will lead to higher agricultural yields from the existing plots of land but also restore the land and the fertility of the soil that has been lost because of human misuse. Training in organic fertilizer production, crop diversification and rotation, water conservation, agro-forestry, nutrition, entrepreneurship, and more are making a huge impact. They even started an "environment club" in the nearby school for the kids to learn alongside their parents.

"Mini-forest" development on individual farms was also introduced. Mr. Gudeto and 19 other farmers were the first to willingly offer their small plots as model farms and were enabled to grow a variety of multipurpose trees in private nurseries under their custody. The end result would be to contribute to the development of the local ecology and reap the benefits of fire wood and protective hedging. Once the land was protected from animal and human contact, it started to naturally regenerate; grass and tree varieties started growing.

Now Mr. Gudeto has enough grass to cover his own hut, stopping the leaks, and sells grass bushels to his neighbours. His vegetable garden produces enough to feed his family a balanced diet and to sell in the local market for extra income to cover the school-related expenses for his children. His children are back in school and two of them are completing vocational training - one in clinical nursing and one in agriculture development.

Mr. Gudeto added, "I am able to send all my children to school. And recently I bought an ox! Thanks to FH who opened my eyes through trainings, provisions, and friendship which brought changes to the life of my family."

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**EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES**  
**TO PROTECT THEIR RESOURCES**  
AMBER VAN SCHOONEVELD, COMPASSION CANADA



Compassion is focused on holistic child development—we help children grow into adults who are able to identify the problems around them and are empowered to take action. Part of that education is teaching children about the importance of being good stewards of the land around them. The places where Compassion works can be the most vulnerable to environmental degradation—areas where there is no waste disposal, destructive agricultural techniques and poor water safety.

Educating children to confront these issues takes different forms in each community, as churches

develop children according to their context.

There is a saying in Thailand: “There are fish in the water and rice in the field.” But in the village of Huay Kom in northern Thailand, the fish were disappearing from the river and the people who drank from it were getting sick. The river had become too polluted.

The director of the Compassion centre in Huay Kom decided change needed to come through the youth. Twice a year, they have camps for the children to teach them about the importance of the natural resources around them and how to protect them. Children learn to plant trees on deforested hills and how to build spawning ponds to help the fish repopulate the river.

In East Africa, Compassion-assisted children plant nearly half a million trees every year, as they learn about the importance of taking care of their environment!

In Kenya, the emotional support Edwin received from his Compassion centre as a boy is now allowing him to give back to his community. Elephant calves are as dependent on their mothers as human babies—not only physically but also emotionally. When baby elephants are orphaned, sometimes by poaching, they often die without the love and affection of a mother. Edwin is now the head keeper of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Nairobi Nursery for Orphans. He credits the emotional nurture he received through Compassion for allowing him to nurse orphaned elephants back to health.

Nicolás saw the way villagers threw trash everywhere in the small community where he worked in Guatemala and decided it needed to change. A university student supported by Compassion, he also teaches children at a local Compassion centre. Together, they started a garbage collecting campaign. They taught children the importance of hygiene and garbage collection and went door to door to educate families as well. They held a community cleaning week in which they cleaned up their streets. They also distributed garbage cans throughout the community and in homes, and now the villagers have a strong pride in their community and work together to keep it clean.

Compassion also focuses on helping our church partners empower their communities to identify the problems they face and find local solutions to address them.

In one drought-stricken village in Tanzania, the farmers came together and decided to form a cereal bank to combat famine. In the good years, they contribute bags of grain to the community cereal bank and in the years of drought, they now have grain available for their families.

In many communities, Compassion is helping people find better agricultural solutions, such as cage fishing, crop diversification, small animal breeding, greenhouse gardening, mushroom cultivation, and beekeeping.

In all of these places, change is coming from the communities themselves. As they are empowered and given access to key resources, communities are able to take charge of the changes they know need to take place and find solutions using their skills, ingenuity, and local resources. And as children are developed to understand that they can be the agents of change in their communities, they continue to surprise us with their innovative solutions to environmental problems!



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## PUTTING DOWN ROOTS: A GENOCIDE SURVIVOR FINDS COMMUNITY AMONG FELLOW GARDENERS

RYAN WALLACE, ADRA CANADA



*Mary\* (left), a participant in ADRA Canada's LEAF program in Rwanda.*

It is dinner time in a small community in the Mwiri District of Rwanda, and smoke can be seen rising from the many kitchen buildings scattered across the village. Here, most people cook on mud-brick ovens over wood fires. As a result, most families have built a separate kitchen building to keep the smoke and soot out of their living and sleeping quarters.

Mary\* emerges from her three-oven kitchen with a delicious dish of freshly-prepared vegetables. Mary is the wife of the president of the local community agriculture cooperative. Most of the food she has prepared was grown in her backyard, as part of ADRA Canada's LEAF program ("Learning Environmental Adaptation for Food security"). Thankfully, one activity of the LEAF program is to install smokeless stoves in the kitchens of program participants, to help address the respiratory conditions and diseases caused by smoke inhalation. Mary doesn't have a smoke-free stove yet, but she's eagerly awaiting its installation.

In many ways, Mary leads a stable, peaceful life on her small plot of land. She is surrounded by banana trees, vegetable gardens, fields of maize, and plots of tree seedlings (as part of the LEAF project's reforestation component). This reforestation is an effort to prevent soil erosion and restore nutrients that have been depleted through years of repetitive farming.

Mary's life has not always been this peaceful. Years ago, during Rwanda's genocide, she nearly died at the hands of a violent mob. She was being chased by a group of men, and only survived by hiding in a dense thicket of thorn bushes. Her pursuers assumed that no one would dare venture into the thicket, and left her there. Severely cut and bleeding, Mary nonetheless survived. Her children were not so fortunate—all but one were killed. Sadly, Mary saw some of her children killed right in front of her eyes.

Now, Mary is a member of a community agriculture cooperative. By participating in ADRA Canada's LEAF program, she received nutrition training that she now uses to teach her fellow co-op members. Her main message to villagers is to eat more green, leafy vegetables, which contain nutrients that many of them are lacking.

Through ADRA Canada's LEAF project, Mary and her village have learned how to use mulching, composting, and other techniques to improve soil moisture and nutrients.

As dusk approaches, children and women from the village begin congregating at the village wells and water taps. Toting large, yellow 'jerry cans' supplied by the government, they socialize as they collect the evening's water.

Surveying the peaceful community scene, Mary sighs with contentment. Turning to the ADRA Canada worker who related this story, she says, “Thank you.” A translator conveys the message, and everyone shares a smile. “Thank you for helping our community!”

\*Name changed to protect privacy.



## THE PERFECT STORM

KRISTEN DEROD VANDERBERG, WORLD RENEW



On August 26, 2014, over the course of a little more than an hour, more than five inches of rain poured down on parched land and became the cause of much celebration. After months of drought, the rain had finally come.

Nicaragua is a country where half of the population make their living as farmers. Since only 4% of farmland is irrigated, the timing of farming activities such as ploughing, planting and harvesting are closely tied to rain cycles. Traditionally, farmers could count on two rainy seasons each year – one in May and another in September. In recent years, however, these rains have become far less predictable.

“Over the past 50 years, the average temperature in Nicaragua has increased by 2 degrees Celsius and precipitation has been reduced by about 15%,” said World Renew Nicaragua staff member, Mark VanderWees.

“This has made it hard for farmers to plant and harvest their crops. When crops fail there is no crop insurance or other safety net to fall back on. The results have been really hard on poor farmers.”

That is just what happened this past year. The spring rains that traditionally begin in May didn't come, and most farmers didn't plant at all. The few that did plant found that the rain they received wasn't nearly sufficient to support a crop using traditional practices.

In the midst of this hardship and disaster, one farmer saw success. World Renew and its local partner, Foundation San Lucas, haven been looking for options to help farmers adapt to the changing weather patterns they are experiencing.

One technique that they have encouraged is conservation farming – a farming practice that combines minimal tillage, spaced planting, organic fertilizer and thick groundcover. It requires a



lot of work in the first year – which makes some people unwilling to invest the time and effort. One farmer, however, was willing to give it a try and saw success as a result.

She was able plant a plot of corn this year using conservation farming. Despite the lack of rains her ground cover retained enough moisture that she was able to harvest a respectable yield of corn. Compared to every field around it, the differences are dramatic. Now others in the community are talking about her plot and interested in trying out the conservation farming techniques themselves.

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