

**WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION  
ASIA – PACIFIC REGION**

**ECOLOGICAL CONCERN PROGRAM**

**REPORT**

***Introduction***

The World Student Christian Federation – Asia-Pacific Region Ecological Concern Program Workshop was held in Taiwan from the 18<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2001.

The urgent situation in terms of environment and ecology in the world, prompted the WSCF-AP region to initiate the “ecological concern project” in order to respond to ecological issues, and come up with visions and action plans towards environmentally sound and sustainable communities. Particularly in the Asia-Pacific Region, exploitation and destruction of nature has been justified in the name of progress and development. Many of countries in the Asia-Pacific have suffered from senseless environmental disasters. If we do not struggle against this false justification and articulate our biblical perspective, the beautiful creation of God will have a disastrous end.

The objectives of the program were:

1. To enable participants to analyse the cause of ecological disasters that have prevailed in the rapidly industrialized world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.
2. To provide a venue for participants to study and analyse together the current issues of environment and ecology.
3. To inspire participants to develop a vision and perspective on the concept of “sustainable community”.
4. To give participants an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of ecology from biblical perspectives.
5. To encourage the WSCF-AP and its local movements to become actively involved in eco-friendly practice and education.

The program was divided into two main sections; exposure visits (incorporating key note addresses and sharing sessions) and national reports / country case histories. Two “Bible Studies” were also incorporated in the program. I really enjoyed the Exposure Visits and the Country Case Histories.

### ***Highlights***

One of the major strengths of the conference was the diversity of the participants. Nine different countries were represented including Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. Unfortunately due to the unstable world events at the time of the conference participants from the Philippines and Sri Lanka were unable to obtain visas.

The exposure visits were designed to highlight some of the projects that different community and church groups have funded and supported. These included visits to the Kong Liao Nuclear Power Plant at Yenliao Bay northeast Taiwan, Yang Ming Mountain National Park and the Banka Church Environmental Program.

The Kong Liao Nuclear Power Plant is being developed in the middle of a small subsistence fishing community. This development is taking away the livelihood of local people and is very strongly opposed on both environmental and economic grounds. Residents are banned from fishing anywhere in the bay which they have been fishing for generations. The indiscriminate development of wharfs and jetties, drainage lines and channels is destroying shoreline and tidal ecosystems. Church and community groups have been assisting residents of Yenliao Bay to organise opposition to the development and to find new sources of income.

Base of wharf development

Yang Ming Mountain National Park has been reserved for both its cultural heritage and environmental values. During the Ming Dynasty, a path winding its way up and over the Yang Ming Mountains was the major trading route connecting Taipei and the coast. Significant geological and biological values abound in the region.

Looking down the mountains towards the coast

Patch worked vegetation coverage  
A relic pointing to the presence of the original inhabitants, the aboriginal hill tribe people

The rock slab paving of the original trading route

Traders Bridge

The Banka Church has developed an environmental program, which is taught as part of a formal Sunday School program. The program is structured to introducing recycling and looking at where food comes from at the lower primary level and at the primary and lower secondary levels the health and ecology of forest and stream ecosystems is studied.



Preschool Choir

Primary Aged Sunday School Class

Listening to the case histories presented by the participants was very encouraging at times. In many Asian countries, church groups are very active working on environmental projects. Compared to other countries in our region, Australian Churches are miles behind in relation to environmental activities. It appears to me that in Australia the Church has, in the majority of cases, been totally silent in relation to the destruction of our Environment. Thankfully in many other countries this has not been the case. I was also very frustrated at times, listening to the presentations, when time and time again examples were given where one country is following down exactly the same path as another has just trod which will lead to the destruction of our environment. When will the world wake up and see what is happening and learn from the mistakes of others?

### ***General Comments***

I believe that with the current state of ecological and environmental disaster facing the world we need more forums to discuss and respond to environmental problems. Christians need to make a stand and understand environmental issues. The WSCF-AP “ecological concern project” appears to be a very good starting point that could grow.

Reflecting on the current program, I believe that the project needs to be focused more clearly to meet the objectives outlined and targeted to a focused group. The understanding of environmental issues that most participants brought to this program was very limited. This meant that the program was targeted at a very basic introductory level, resulting in the program not meeting all the objectives.

The first two objectives (*To enable participants to analyse the cause of ecological disasters that have prevailed in the rapidly industrialized world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. To provide a venue for participants to study and analyse together the current issues of environment and ecology*) were clearly met. The remaining two objectives (*To inspire participants to develop a vision and perspective on the concept of “sustainable community”. To give participants an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of ecology from biblical perspectives*) were not met. Two ‘Bible study’ sessions were conducted during the program, but these were seriously lacking in Biblical content and were more lectures about environmental issues. I found this very disappointing, as I had been looking forward to further exploring ecology from a Biblical perspective.

I strongly believe that the environmental program needs to be expanded if it is going to meet its objectives. I would like to recommend to the WSCF-AP and the IRO that two environmental programs be implemented, an **Introduction to Environmental Concerns Workshop** and a **Deep Ecology Workshop**. Having two workshops, each one run every second year, would help to target the programs and some of the problems experienced during this program.

### *Areas for Action*

I would like to encourage groups to become involved with and committed to environmental projects in their local areas. I would also like to encourage groups to build networks with environmental groups on campus etc. to establish a dialogue that we are Christians but we also are active and care for the environment. We need to have our voice heard. I know this is a lot easier said than done but it is achievable. When there is a debate on environmental issues in the media and society, I believe that we need to be seen actively supporting the environment at both a national and local level.

I would also like to make the suggestion that we could consider promoting a national project that could be adopted by groups or individuals. I was thinking that a project such as looking at the sales and export of rainforest species, which has both environmental and human rights issues might be a good starting point. If we had some form of a broad national project then people that are isolated from active groups could feel as though they were part of something. A project such as the teak trade that has many different aspects and issues could appeal to most people, as there would be a component or issue that inspires a particular interest.

In discussions at the workshop the suggestion was raised that we investigate hosting a joint Australia Aotearoa (New Zealand) Environmental Conference and Workshop. It appears that in the understanding of environmental issues Australia and Aotearoa are on a par, which is at a different level to many other Asian Countries. Building links with Aotearoa and hosting a joint program could greatly benefit both movements.

I would like to thank ASCM for giving me the opportunity to attend the Ecological Concern Program. I am really looking forward to being able to share my experiences further. I hope and pray that this will be the beginning of a strong new program.

Peace

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***Program Outline***

Programme 1–

**Introduction to Environmental Concerns Workshop**

Target Group –

Participants who are just starting to consider environmental issues.

Objectives –

1. To provide a venue for participants to study and analyse together the current issues of environment and ecology.
2. To enable participants to analyse the cause of ecological disasters that have prevailed in the rapidly industrialized world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.
3. To introduce an understanding of ecology from a biblical perspective.
4. To encourage the WSCF-AP and its local movements to involve actively in eco-friendly practice and education.

Sessions could include –

Exposure visits:

exploring local environmental issues

visiting community action groups

visiting alternative energy sources

Country briefings

Case histories of environmental problems and solutions.

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Programme 2 –

### **Deep Ecology Workshop**

Target Group –

Participants who have an understanding of environmental issues, thought about their faith in an environmental context and wish to explore this further.

Objectives –

1. To provide a venue for participants to study and analyse together the current issues of environment and ecology.
2. To inspire participants to develop a vision and perspective on the concept of “sustainable community”.
3. To give participants an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of ecology from biblical perspectives.
4. To encourage the WSCF-AP and its local movements to involve actively in eco-friendly practice and education.

Sessions could include-

Exploring ecology from a Biblical perspective

Considering the sacraments from an environmental perspective

Exploring faith in the context of deep ecology and modern environmental thought

A debate on environmentalism as a religion

Writing and developing environmental liturgies

The World Council of Churches Climate Change Programme

The Earth Bible Project.