

Eco-green role of religious communities

Tuesday, 26 January 2016
BY NOR AZARUDDIN HUSNI HJ NURUDDIN

All faiths and spiritualities to look inward at their traditions to solve environment issues.

ALL world religions should play an important role in addressing climate change and global environmental issues. They have to look at what their own religions have to say and take action on issues pertaining to environmental protection.

Each religion should apply the green concept to their festive celebrations. For example, Muslims have to apply The Green Guide for Hajj/ The Green Guide for Umrah (in which pilgrims are not allowed to cut down trees while in Ihram), Greening Ramadan (minimum wastage/disposal of unfinished food), Greening the Mosque (energy conservation of electricity and water used for ablution), etc.

Such campaigns teach followers the link between Islam and nature. Indeed, the term “green concept” has to be applied in global environmental issues to lessen the impact of climate change.

Greenhouse gases are those that absorb and emit infrared radiation in the wavelength range emitted by Earth. The most abundant greenhouse gases in Earth’s atmosphere are water vapour, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide, ozone and chlorofluorocarbons.

Without greenhouse gases, the average temperature of Earth’s surface would be about 15°C (27°F) colder than the present average of 14°C (57°F). Greenhouse gases (GHGs) can be emitted through transport, land clearance, and the production and consumption of food, fuel, manufactured goods, materials, wood, roads, buildings, and services.

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in 1750, human activities have produced a 40% increase in the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide, from 280 ppm (parts per million) in year 1750 to 400 ppm in 2015.

It has been estimated that if greenhouse gas emissions are produced at the present rate, the Earth’s surface temperature will potentially have harmful effects on the ecosystem, biodiversity and the livelihoods of people worldwide.

A carbon footprint is defined as “a measure of the total amount of CO₂ and CH₄ emissions of a defined population, system or activity, considering all relevant sources, sinks and storage within the spatial and temporal boundary of the population, system or activity of interest”.

It is calculated as carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) using the relevant 100-year global warming potential (GWP100). An individual, nation, or an organisation’s carbon footprint can be measured by undertaking a GHG emissions assessment or other calculative activities denoted as carbon accounting.

Carbon footprint also can be calculated by using the free carbon footprint calculator on-line (<http://www.nature.org/greenliving/carboncalculator/>).

On Jan 14, several Ikim staff attended a briefing on the Green Concept by speakers from the International Green Training Centre (IGTC) in Ayer Keroh Country Club, Malacca. We were briefed on the fundamental understanding of green technology, green practices and green compliance for the ultimate target of sustainable living.

There are many Green concepts that can be applied in our daily life such as Green Goals, Green Fundamentals, Green Buildings, Green Energy, Green Transportation, Green Economy, Green Culture and others.

But what interested us most and what we would like to share with our readers is our visit to the Socso Rehabilitation Centre at Malacca, a Green concept building. As we drove into the area, the semi-open, high-ceilinged lobby of the administration building exuded a welcoming feel.

Three skylights provide natural lighting in the porch, which is separated from the interior by a green-tinted glass panel in the centre. The administrative building is certified under Malaysia’s Green Building Index, the green rating tool for buildings to promote sustainability in the built environment.

The Rehabilitation Centre is located in Malacca’s Bandar Hijau, Hang Tuah Jaya, and it proudly stands as a Green Building. The whole area is a Green Zone and is designated for institutional buildings.

According to the Green Building index, a “Green Building focuses on increasing the efficiency of resource use – energy, water and materials – while reducing impact on human health and the environment during the building’s life cycle through better siting, design, construction, operation, maintenance and removal”.

The centre’s facades are built with low-e (low-emissivity) glass panels, which reflect 60% to 70% of heat. Such glass reflects heat, leading to lower energy needed to cool a room. It takes about five to seven years to get energy savings back from the low-e glass, so it is a viable solution in the long run.

The facades facing west do not feature glass panels, only concrete, in order to minimise heat inside the buildings. The buildings are also designed to allow natural sunlight and air in through skylights and air wells, by keeping ceilings high, and using an open interior design concept. The features succeed so well at introducing natural light that artificial lighting is not required during the day – which is quite unusual for an office building.

The administration building lobby has no air-conditioning, as the high ceiling and other design features promote natural cooling. Insulating materials – including aluminium cladding – on the roof and certain walls are also used to keep heat out. To further reduce its energy footprint, the complex has a centralised air-conditioning system and water chillers.

The Green Concept in a way accords with Islamic environmental ethics, (for eg, it does not waste natural resources, time, electricity, water, food, time by not indulging in rumour mongering, and money by advocating wise spending, etc) whereby the solution to environmental problems lies in the revival of spirituality and faith.

The environment and the protection of the Earth unite followers of other religions too, hence the common objective to preserve the livelihood of all living beings. While an exclusive religious approach cannot solve the problems of climate change, it can contribute to a change in human attitudes.

The “balance” in Islamic environmental ethics is translated as “ecological balance” or “a middle way”. Such a principle calls for the conservation or the restoration of balance on Earth, both in terms of harmony within Nature, as well as the field of human justice and morality in day-to-day dealings.

God has created the Earth and everything in it as perfect, free from fault, and in balance. However, it is the task of human beings to keep it that way.

Nor Azaruddin Husni Hj Nuruddin is a Senior Fellow with Ikim. The views expressed here are entirely the writer’s own.