

A Proposal

COPE Project

A joint effort of the Workers Education Association of Zambia (WEAZ) and Earth Charter US (ECUS)

Goal:

The goal is to move people who live in rural villages of Zambia out of poverty without having to pass through the carbon economy, into what we are calling the contentment economy in one generation.

Guiding principles from the Earth Charter:

Respect and Care for the Community of Life

- sustainable development by reducing the fuel burden on the environment
- create locally controlled and focused programs in tune with indigenous practices

Ecological Integrity

- create sustainable systems that allows local people to move out of poverty without having to go through the disastrous carbon economy
- build sustainable economic systems in harmony with local practices that have the minimum impact on local resources

Social and Economic Justice

- eradicate poverty and disease as a main goal
- create fair systems of resource allocation that respect indigenous culture while building on local efforts to eliminate practices that exploit either people or resources
- affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity

Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace

- building local leadership to carry out the necessary steps to meet the local needs
- creating sustainable techniques to meet the needs of local people without having to resort to violence or aggression to obtain resources
- create systems of ongoing education that not only improve the minds of the young, but also the skills to build sustainable communities for the future

The Challenge:

Poverty in the rural areas of Zambia presents a significant environmental, health, social, and economic challenge. About 80% of Zambia's 10.2 million people live in the rural areas, an area about the size of Texas. The average yearly income is \$250 American. 80% of Rural Households collect firewood as their main cooking energy. Only 35% of rural areas have access to a safe water supply. 68.5% of the rural people live in traditional houses. Subsistence farming is the main source of food, with the little surplus being sent to the government to feed the cities, yet that surplus approaches 90% of the urban food supply.

The challenges facing the rural population of Zambia are especially daunting for women. The task of fetching firewood and water falls to the women and young girls. Polygamy is widespread and in those cases, women provide the labor force on the farms, but when the surplus food is sold the men take all the money from the sales. Further, in most cases men have ownership of the land. When the husband

dies, the land is taken away from the widow and given back to the husband's family.

There are several serious environmental concerns. First, the gathering of firewood has decimated local forest areas. As the forest has retreated, the soil has become depleted and is easily eroded especially by wind, risking desertification. Second, the lack of public sanitation has resulted in the pollution of the human water supply. Thirdly, the rise in world food prices has led the government to focus on industrial farming techniques which has resulted in the clearing of many hectares of land further straining the ecosystem.

Public health is a further serious concern. Zambia as a whole has about 800 doctors but only 40%, or 320, served the 8 million people in an area the size of Texas. The rural population suffers from an inordinate amount of common and preventable disease as a result of exposure to polluted water and indoor smoke from cooking. The frequency of AIDS is estimated to be as high as 30%. The life expectancy is 37 years old. This is not due solely to a high infant mortality rate, since people over 60 years of age represent less than 3% of the total population.

Public Health issues also disproportionately affect women. Smoke from indoor cooking fires is a serious health issue. The United Nations says inefficient stoves can be as bad for health as smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. In sub-Saharan Africa over 1.5 million females die prematurely every year from inhaling poisonous fumes as they cook or heat their homes with traditional organic fuels. Nearly 1,000,000 children under five years of age die due to infections in the lower breathing tract.

Our Solution:

To address this challenging situation, WEAZ and ECUS are forming the COPE Project (Community Action on Poverty and Environment) to address these challenges in three key areas.

Cooking fuels

Using a model developed by Solar Cookers International, COPE will train two villages to use solar cookers to prepare their traditional meals. During those times when there is not enough sunlight, the villages will also be trained to use rocket stoves, made from local materials, which are highly efficient and require very little fuel.

Sanitation

Using a model developed in Namibia called the Otji Toilet, the same two villages will be trained to build sanitary waterless toilets out of local materials.

Water pasteurization

The same two villages will be trained in water pasteurization techniques using a variety of appropriate load technology methods including solar heating.

Expected outcomes:

The concentration of all three interventions in the same village is expected to have a profound ecological, economic, and social outcome. By reducing incidents of preventable disease through proper sanitation and water pasteurization, people in the villages will be far healthier, having more strength to engage in their traditional activities including farming. By using ecologically friendly fuels for cooking, people in the village, especially women and girls, will have more time to engage in other

productive activities, including education and social groups. The reduction in respiratory illness will also increase health and strength.

The increase in health, strength, and time will allow the people in the villages to develop what we are calling a Contentment Economy. This economy will develop in several ways.

First, the people who are trained in the technologies of building solar cookers, rocket stoves, Otji Toilets, and water pasteurization techniques will be allowed to sell these to other villagers. There will be an incentive for the person to sell the technology as well as for people to purchase it. The savings in not having to purchase firewood or charcoal easily pays for a solar stove in only a week. The extra time and energy from drinking safe water and using proper sanitation can be used in other economic activities that will quickly pay off those investments.

Girls and young women who no longer have to spend large amounts of time engaged in gathering firewood and water can now go to school. Grown women will now have time to engage in social activities of their choice. For instance, micro-financing groups will be an important part of local economic growth. This might be at least one option for these women's groups. Other options might include crafts groups, social service groups, or some other community purpose.

Men and boys, having more health, time, and energy, will be able to increase their economic work activities, especially farming. The Zambian government already has a program to purchase surplus food from the subsistence farmers. The problem is that a lack of time, health and energy prevents many villagers from participating. The additional food will mean additional income that will support the local economy.

By improving local health, which provides people more time and energy for productive enterprise, and creating a local sustainable economy, COPE will give people in villages the opportunity to work through their traditional cultural mechanisms to address the issues most important to them. COPE is run entirely by citizens of Zambia working in cooperation with local village leaders. Our hope is that these traditional indigenous cultural structures will give villagers the opportunity to meet their human social needs in a contentment economy without having to go through the disastrous carbon economy. By using minimal appropriate technology, this project will reduce negative burdens on the environment and allow it to return to its traditional place in community life.

It is important to note that the goal of the project includes giving the local village structure the power to decide how to use the additional time and energy which results from being healthier. It is the belief of the COPE project that each village must choose its own culturally appropriate activities rather than having them imposed by outside forces.

Implementation:

WEAZ has already selected two villages to participate. About 30 participants in each village along with the WEAZ fieldworkers will be trained in the various aspects of the project. During the first year, the villages and WEAZ will refine the training and implementation aspects of the COPE project.

In the second year, each of the first year villages will train two nearby villages. WEAZ will train two more villages in different parts of Zambia. Each of the newly trained villages, those trained by WEAZ and those trained by first-year villages, will be expected to train two more villages each year. If the COPE project keeps to this ambitious schedule, all the rural villages can move to the contentment

economy in one generation.

WEAZ has been involved in running educational programs since its inception in 1998. In that short time, WEAZ has trained over 500 community leaders and groups. Their training expertise is focused on the socially, economically, and educationally disadvantaged people. WEAZ already has ongoing organizing work in the two first selected villages.

Funding always presents a serious challenge to the development of programs. Therefore, the COPE project has been focused on developing a low-cost and sustainable model that can easily be replicated and is highly decentralized. During the first year, the COPE project is developing the systems and processes which will provide complete transparency for all its funding.

The plan is that somewhere in the first year, Earth Charter US will begin an outreach project to solicit supporters for the COPE project. Supporters of the COPE project will select a village to fund. The level of funding is yet to be determined. The money will go to the village to be used as part of the COPE strategies. Most likely, most of it will go to the creation of micro-finance which will not only fund aspects of the technology, but become a sustainable base for future economic development. People who donate will be able to follow each of their dollars through the transparent processes the COPE project will develop. Their selected village will stay in touch with them through the Internet using pictures, video, and e-mails. In fact, donors can even go to visit their selected village to see the progress firsthand.

This funding model has many significant advantages. First, by being directed at the village level there is never enough money in one place at one time to attract corruption. Also, by keeping the amounts small and focused on the villages, COPE project will not pose a threat to existing NGOs. The second great advantage is that the project is as close to people to people as possible. This is a fundamental Earth Charter belief. Individuals helping individuals without the intervention of large or wasteful bureaucracies will bring us closer as a sustainable global community. When we reach out to one another as co-equal partners in the creation of a sustainable, ethical, and meaningful life, we will accomplish the goal set out in the Earth charter preamble:

It is imperative that we, the peoples of the earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.