



## Eco Newsletter, Feb 2024, Issue 10

### Snapshots from COP28

#### Editorial

At the time of writing, I am sitting in a snow-covered beautiful landscape in the Swedish Forests. It is cold, minus 10, and it is stunningly beautiful. I am reflecting on our participation in the last UNclimate change conference [COP28](#), which took place in Dubai, UAE, in December 2023. With over 80.000 participants, it became the biggest COP conference ever. The Brahma Kumaris is an accredited observer organisation and was represented by an experienced team with over 15 delegates. The faith-based community, including the Brahma Kumaris, consistently addresses this topic of will, ethics and responsibility.

The presence of the Brahma Kumaris and our message, "*When I change, the World changes.*" is becoming increasingly valuable. Our record number of events, interviews, and many meaningful conversations prove the need for spirituality and meditation at these conferences.

The BK Environment Initiative was honoured to launch the daily LIVE panel discussion 'Climate Wisdom from COP28'. This exclusive series on "Care - Share - Inspire" aimed to bring the latest in science, policies, and wisdom from the COP28 climate conference directly to the global audience. It was hosted by our local partner, the Raja Yoga Center in Dubai.

#### Being an Ecological Citizen

In one climate wisdom livestream, we discussed what it means to be an ecological citizen. Can we call ourselves that? An ecological citizen would understand that whatever one does to the self and others, one does to the planet. They would also know that the climate in themselves affects the climate around them. Our role as citizens in our communities extends beyond just living in harmony with nature; it involves actively contributing to the well-being of our environment.

#### Being a Compassionate Citizen

The need for compassion and good wishes for all living beings is becoming tangible at the COP conference. People break down in anxiety in seeing the lack of political commitment to long-lasting change. When we feel that we can do something to make a difference, it helps to alleviate the frustration and anxiety. We can always have good wishes, pure feelings, and vibrations for nature, which benefits the self and the planet. Our small steps of goodness multiply hope.

I trust all our readers will enjoy the articles from COP28 in this newsletter. I wish the world community would embrace the old saying: We should treat our bodies and our planet like we were to live forever and our minds like we were to die tomorrow. And not the opposite!

Thanks a lot.



Warm wishes,  
Sonja Ohlsson  
Director of Brahma Kumaris, Denmark

## Faith and Sustainability: A Spiritual Approach towards Environmental Responsibility (30 Nov 2023)



During the COP, religious, faith, spiritual and Indigenous communities had the opportunity to come together to call for urgent action and to inspire the world with their values, wisdom and practical solutions in the move towards a sustainable future. For the first time at the UN Climate Conference, there was a Faith Pavilion which put on events featuring over 325 speakers from over 55 countries.

**Massamba Thioye**, the moderator, welcomed speakers to the Global Innovation Hub, a concept initiated in COP26 to mobilise innovation in service of people and the planet. The platform sought to blend innovation with spirituality, bridging the gap between technological advancements and ethical considerations.

**Emilce Cude**, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, underscored the importance of a compassionate social environment dialogue. Rejecting the notion that diplomacy is solely for

commerce, she asserted the need to trust in humanity and God, emphasising the role of faith in fostering meaningful connections and solutions.

**Sister Jayanti**, Additional Head of Brahma Kumaris, spoke passionately about the faith community's collective voice. She emphasised the time for respect, urging a rediscovery of self and a recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings. Sister Jayanti highlighted the power of silence in fostering innovation, asserting that reflection in quietude brings about new ways of thinking.

**Ovais Sarmad**, Former Deputy Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, challenged existing value systems. He called for a deeper examination of our responsibilities as stewards of the Earth, as dictated by religious scriptures. Sarmad urged shedding ego and desires, emphasising that the harm inflicted upon the planet is not divine retribution but a consequence of human actions.

**RT Rev Handy**, virtually joining from California, deemed the climate crisis a spiritual one. He urged a shift in the prevailing worldview towards one rooted in peace and love. Notably, this marked the first COP featuring a Faith Pavilion, where representatives from nine different religions collaborated on meditation cards exploring spiritual values. The Christian cards, for instance, focused on Confession, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness, illustrating diverse paths to transition from brokenness to wholeness. In essence, each religion contributes a dynamic perspective on this transformative journey.

To watch the whole event: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4viY\\_49LEyc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4viY_49LEyc)

## Visionary Leadership for the transition to clean technology (6 Dec 2023)



As the theme at COP turned to Energy, Industry and Just Transition, our events began by exploring some of the ethical and other issues at stake in order to achieve a just transition to more sustainable sources of energy. In this featured session, held in the Faith Pavilion, our speakers explore the role of faith and community leaders in providing trustworthy and at times visionary leadership to communities in order to support the changes in mindset and culture required for transition to clean technologies.

**Sonja Ohlsson**, the Climate Director for Brahma Kumaris, opened the discussion by inviting the audience to contemplate the mindset required to embrace clean technology. She also asked them to reflect on personal situations where they had witnessed inspiring leadership.

**Abdullah Mohammed Baobeid**, a sustainable livelihood practitioner from Yemen, emphasised the pivotal role of faith and community leaders in managing conflicts and reducing local tensions. Abdullah shared the challenges faced in Yemen—food and water security and energy access being paramount. Without access to these essentials, the risk of falling back into conflict loomed large. Faith leaders, he asserted, are playing a crucial role in inspiring sustainable living and upholding human rights within their congregations.

**Caitlyn Hughes**, representing Solar Cookers International, shared how the power of solar cooking has brought together community leaders from diverse backgrounds and united them in the desire and understanding that it is possible to improve people's lives while protecting the planet. Good leaders will focus on the things that bind us together such as our daily cooking. She highlighted the alarming statistic that 2.4 billion people still cooked over open fires, causing pollution and health hazards. At COP28, Solar Cookers International aimed to persuade country leaders to adopt policies supportive of clean cooking, thus unlocking opportunities and empowering more solar cooks.

**Kenneth Nana Amatoeng**, associated with the Abibimman Foundation in Ghana, shared his experience of a community where people believed their lack of rain was a consequence of their sins, rather than due to climate change. He highlighted the importance of faith leaders in remedying this. These leaders, he argued, held the trust of the people in a way politicians could not. Through education and training, faith leaders could empower communities to understand climate change's effects and the positive impact of clean cooking technology.

**Golo Pilz**, the project designer of solar and thermal power generation projects in India, spoke passionately about leadership and vision. Recalling the inception of solar energy use at the Brahma Kumaris headquarters 30 years ago, he credited Dadi Janki, a leader within the organisation, for inspiring him to research into different ways in which solar energy could be used. Today, thanks to her encouragement, Brahma Kumaris have solar cooking systems across all their main campuses at their headquarters in Rajasthan. The Abu Road campus, in particular, can prepare up to 35,000 meals daily using a solar steam system established two decades ago. The campus also has a solar power plant providing electricity for the entire facility.

At the end, Golo led the audience in a meditation, to send love, peace, and compassion to everyone in the world, nature, and the future.

Watch on YouTube [Visionary Leadership for the transition to clean technology - Brahma Kumaris - YouTube](#)



## Youth Rising in Solidarity for Environmental Defenders and Safeguarding Lives, Nature and the Future (9 Dec 2023)



During the conference, there was a great deal of emphasis on empowering young people to shape the outcomes of COP28 and beyond, particularly considering the disproportionate risks and impacts from climate change for children and youth. In this featured event we hear heroic narratives from young people who have lost loved ones and risked their own lives in the name of climate justice.

For this unique session, speakers chose to remain seated among the audience, a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the very people they represented.

A video "Sha'a," was played, showcasing the brave struggle of Peregrino Shanocua from the Dominican Republic. The film documented his courageous protest against illegal gold mining that ravaged his homeland's sacred forests. Throughout his protest he faced abduction, beatings, and life-threatening situations. Shanocua eventually halted his fight, raising a poignant question to the audience, "What would you do in my place?"

**Dominic Nyasulu**, the National Coordinator of World Faith from Malawi, spoke next. He recounted his organization's battle against the Malawi government's plan to extract water from a conservation area. Triumphantly, Nyasulu shared how they took the government to court and emerged victorious. However, the victory was not without consequences, as leaders and politicians threatened Nyasulu and his group. He pondered aloud, "How can the next generation of protesters be shielded from such threats?"

**Nansedalia Ramirez**, a representative of the Youth of the Mexican Network of Peasant Forestry, narrated the perilous journey her community faced when a mining project threatened to destroy their forests and displace their people. Despite facing threats, Ramirez's community secured an injunction to halt the destructive mining. With hope in her eyes, she said, "This story gives hope that we can change the world by coming together. People shouldn't have to risk their lives. We need measures to ensure human rights."

Next came **Nidia Pacheco**, a Youth Coordinator from Panama, who shared a heartbreaking tale of forced relocation during her childhood. Driven from their ancestral lands due to a dam, Pacheco's indigenous group lost their culture and language. Undeterred, she now works tirelessly to recover her

people's traditions and spearhead reforestation efforts. "We feel we have a responsibility to carry on the traditions of our grandparents," she declared with unwavering determination.

**Ina-Maria Shikongo** from Namibia, daughter of a freedom fighter who lost his life, spoke passionately against fracking in the Kavango Basin. This region was not only home to endangered species but also indigenous communities. Shikongo confronted the powerful forces behind the fracking industry, facing constant surveillance and even attempted arrests by the police. Unfazed, she asserted, "I don't know about fear. There is space for a better world."

As the event drew to a close, a powerful moment unfolded. All participants joined hands, led by Shantanu Mandal, a representative of the Brahma Kumaris. He shared that "The word 'defending' comes from lack of love. When there is love, everything is saved." Then he asked everyone to visualise themselves radiating light to the whole world, a collective beacon of hope for a better, more compassionate future.

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDKIQvo8p3g>

## Cultivating Change: Nurturing Sustainable Food Systems Amidst Climate Challenges, (10 Dec 2023)



Climate change is creating severe pressure and risks for the agri-food and water systems that underpin human well-being. At the same time, these systems are also key contributors to climate change: one-third of all human-made GHG emissions derive from agri-food systems, and 70% of freshwater consumed worldwide is used for agricultural production.

Our events in the closing days of COP28, such as this one featured, focused on promoting sustainable food systems and explored how to change mindsets and habits so as to encourage

lifestyle choices that are good for us and the planet.

**Priyanka Patil** and **Shantanu Mandal** from Brahma Kumaris spearheaded an engaging activity, urging participants to share their favourite foods. Potato leaves, cassava, and matoke (green banana) with sauce were among the diverse culinary preferences. However, the exercise took a poignant turn as attendees inscribed a "food erosion" on coloured sticky notes – a once easily accessible food item that has become scarce.

The resulting mosaic of sticky notes formed a symbolic flower, representing the challenges faced by communities worldwide. Traditional foods like arrowroots, yams, cassava, and sweet potatoes have lost their appeal due to soil degradation and excessive fertiliser use. Local fish and traditional delicacies have become scarcer and more expensive, influenced by environmental pollution. Changing weather patterns affected plant growth, rendering some staples inaccessible.

In a bid to transform challenges into actionable solutions, participants were prompted to jot down their ideas on sticky notes. Shantanu Mandal invoked ancient wisdom, stating, "You see the problem because you know the solution." Proposed solutions included:

- Preserving soils through ecological farming practices like agroforestry.
- Conserving original quality seeds and avoiding genetically modified organisms (GMOs).
- Allowing fruits and vegetables to ripen fully, optimising nutritional content.
- Increasing tree planting to enhance rainfall and support sustainable agriculture.
- Recognizing the true value of farming, ensuring fair compensation to incentivize and retain skilled farmers.

A compelling video showcased a Brahma Kumaris project collaborating with farmers cultivating only wheat and potatoes. The initiative introduced nutrition gardens featuring 50 diverse vegetable species, demonstrating the potential for sustainable farming. An inspiring 82-year-old lady, cultivating climate-smart foods like cassava, shared seeds within her village, countering the trend of younger generations leaving for urban employment. The project aimed not only to address nutritional needs but also to reconnect communities with the richness of traditional farming practices in harmony with nature.

Watch here [COP28 Children and Youth Pavilion \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)