



*Position Paper:*

**Sustainable and Just  
Stewardship of Natural  
Resources**

# **Position Paper: Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources**

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Why Danmission works to further Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources .....	4
3. What does Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources mean for Danmission? .....	6
4. Danmission’s intentions.....	9
Examples of Danmission’s activities:.....	9
Examples of Danmission’s activities:.....	10
Examples of Danmission’s activities:.....	11
5. How Danmission works to further Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources .....	13
The added value of Danmission’s .....	13
Local leadership approach: .....	13
Faith-based approach: .....	13
6. Human rights, Gender and Theme 3: Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources .....	15
Examples of Danmission’s activities:.....	16
7. Examples of Danmission’s work.....	17

# Position Paper: Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources

## 1. Introduction

This paper presents Danmission's position and definition of its work on Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources as outlined in Theme 3 in Danmission's programme strategy 'Sustainable Existence, Peaceful Co-existence'. Alongside Theme 3, the programme strategy outlines Theme 1 on Contextual Theology for Faith and Social Action, Theme 2 on Dialogue and Peacebuilding, and the crosscutting principle of human rights and gender equality. This position paper refers to and builds on the programme strategy and Danmission's Understanding of Mission, "There is hope, there is forgiveness, there is life".

The position paper is approved by the board and is primarily directed to the staff and partners of Danmission to support a common understanding of Danmission's thematic areas and approaches. The position paper is also directed to donors and potential donors.

## 2. Why Danmission works to further Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:28). “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.” (Genesis 1:29). “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:31).*

As a Christian organisation, Danmission is called to participate in the stewardship of God's creation with other Christians and fellow beings. The term 'stewardship' is contested among theologians. For Danmission, stewardship is defined thus in its Understanding of Mission: “Life is a gift, and God created humankind in His image. We as humans have been handed the responsibility to save life in its diversity and ensure sound relations between nature and human life. So, while mankind is part of the Creation, we are also entrusted responsibility for it by the will of God”. However, in the contexts of our program work, other theological understandings of stewardship exist. Inspired by our partners, we acknowledge and work with the fact that humans and nature are ‘fellow sufferers’, which ties humankind and nature together.

God's creation is in crisis – not because of God, but because of humanity's greed, corruption, and broken relationship with God. God created a world of abundance and food for all its creatures, but humans are driving many creatures off the earth and populating it with animals that can be used for human consumption. God has also created abundance in other areas; the globe is rich in all kinds of natural resources, but in varying degrees most are in the process of being exhausted.

God's creation faces unprecedented challenges, and humanity is in a state of overshoot. Overshoot occurs when people use energy and biological resources faster than ecosystems can regenerate and also pollute beyond nature's assimilative capacity. In other words, modern humans are consuming, polluting, and destroying the biophysical basis of our own existence – God's creation. The symptoms of overshoot are biodiversity loss, deforestation, overfishing, land and soil degradation, pollution, climate change, etc.. Overshoot and its symptoms result in increased poverty and natural resource conflicts, adversely affecting human well-being.

The crisis caused by overshoot calls for changes as the consequences accelerate – a conversion in mind and lifestyle from consumerism and the unsustainable use of

natural resources to spirituality and mindful stewardship. It also calls for a perspective on creation that highlights the interdependence of *all* creation. We must realise that ignoring nature is ignoring the love of our neighbour because our neighbour suffers from the destruction. This requires a renewed focus on the stewardship that Christ practised in his relation to us and the world he loved. As a Christian organisation with considerable links and outreach to churches and other faith-based and civil society actors, Danmission is uniquely positioned to advance a Christian response to overshoot and promote an eco-theology caring for both people and the planet.

### **3. What does Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources mean for Danmission?**

Danmission's programme strategy outlines three intervention areas for its work on Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources:

- Enhancing theological and spiritual-based responses to poverty and natural resource scarcity.
- Strengthening sustainable, just, and equitable access to, and use of, natural resources.
- Preventing and managing natural resource conflicts.

The three intervention areas are interlinked, and each of them is also linked to Theme 1 on Contextual Theology for Faith and Social Action and Theme 2 on Dialogue and Peacebuilding. Although each intervention area has its specific focus, Danmission's work on Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources will often focus on more than one intervention area and link with other thematic areas.

Natural resources are essential for humankind. Without natural resources, humans cannot survive. Every person depends on natural resources for their daily survival and well-being. The concept of natural resources is contested, and various definitions exist. In the Oxford Reference Dictionary the definition is: "Factors of production provided by nature. This includes land suitable for agriculture, mineral deposits, and water resources useful for power generation, transport, and irrigation. It also includes sea resources, such as fish and offshore mineral deposits."<sup>1</sup> This definition implies only an economic and materialistic understanding of resources, as no spiritual dimensions are considered. For Danmission, natural resources are part of God's creation and, as such, have a spiritual and existential dimension.

The human enterprise as a whole is in a state of overshoot. The main cause of this state of affairs is the unsustainable, unjust, and inequitable use of natural resources. Historically and presently, the Global North is the primary contributor to the state of overshoot, but the consequences are mainly experienced in the Global South. A growing middle class in the Global South is increasingly contributing to the state of overshoot.

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100225401;jsessionid=0D454530BAFB5646E9D2E4E94B1E0681#:~:text=Factors%20of%20production%20provided%20by,in%20A%20Dictionary%20of%20Economics%20%C2%BB>

The increasing global population is contributing to resource scarcity, conflicts over natural resources, and poverty. So advancing sustainable and just stewardship of natural resources requires a simultaneous focus on poverty reduction and conflict management.

The overexploitation of resources disproportionately benefits a few – the elite in the Global North and South – and causes harm to everyone due to its effects on the well-being of humans and other beings. Profound structural, political, and economic changes are needed to address the symptoms of overshoot, but a prevalent business-as-usual paradigm is hindering this. This entails challenging existing local and global power structures, including the elite capture of natural resources.

The symptoms of overshoot are numerous, and its effect on local communities and Indigenous Peoples in the Global South is complex and multifaceted. Indigenous Peoples have a close relationship, connectedness and interdependence with nature and have been custodians of natural resources from time immemorial. The quest for natural resources results in deforestation, biodiversity loss, natural resource conflicts, and evictions of Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities (urban and rural) by state and private actors. The number of disputes over natural resources is expected to increase dramatically in the years to come. At the same time, the expansion of the human enterprise profoundly impacts local communities and Indigenous Peoples' identity, culture, and spiritual connectedness with nature. In the scramble for land, the human rights of the local communities and Indigenous Peoples are frequently violated: land and forests traditionally governed by local communities and Indigenous Peoples are confiscated by the state and private actors; they are denied access to their land and forests, including sacred sites, which is a violation of their right to practise their faith. Environmental human rights defenders are being harassed, and their livelihood is being undermined, resulting in increased poverty.

As the symptoms of overshoot are many, Danmission has chosen to select the following as its primary focus: Biodiversity loss, deforestation, land and soil degradation, and desertification. Climate change is a critical overshoot symptom, and Danmission will focus on it through food safety and security, biodiversity, and forest preservation. With respect to natural resources, Danmission has chosen to focus on three specific natural resources: land, forest, and water. Local communities (rural and urban) and Indigenous Peoples in Danmission's programme countries are experiencing a daily biodiversity loss, deforestation, land and soil degradation, and desertification. These are the key target groups of Danmission's interventions.

In many countries, management and ownership of natural resources is a sensitive issue due to the elite capture of resources. It therefore comes with risks for Danmission, local partners, local communities and Indigenous Peoples to address these issues. Security for local communities, Indigenous Peoples, local partners and local Danmission staff is thus a strong focus of Danmission.

Danmission aims to address the symptoms of overshoot and its consequences for local communities and Indigenous Peoples. This requires an interlinked strategy: advancing natural resource justice and addressing the effects of overshoot. Danmission's engagement in recycling and upcycling activities in Denmark should be seen in this context. This also entails promoting eco-theology, and focusing on the interconnectedness and interdependency between humans and nature, as well as its many forms of life.



## 4. Danmission's intentions

This section summarises the three intervention areas and provides examples of our activities. As Danmission works in countries with different contexts, the examples may only be applicable in particular contexts.

The first intervention area, *“Enhancing theological and spiritual-based responses to poverty and natural resource scarcity”*, is based on the premise that the world needs a) eco-theology and spirituality, b) increased attention to the interconnectedness and interdependency between humans and earth, and 3) a stronger connection and cooperation between faith actors to address the consequences of overshoot. The programme strategy outlines three sub-intervention areas:

- Fostering Christian theological and multi-religious reflection on just, equitable, and responsible stewardship across religious and other divides (eco-theology).
- Strengthening spiritual and social connectedness among faith groups affected by poverty and natural resource issues (interconnectedness).
- Promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation on poverty and natural resource issues (green interfaith).

### **Examples of Danmission's activities:**

- Supporting theological institutions to develop an eco-theology program for students.
- Creating space for theological thinkers and doers to reflect theologically on eco-theology.
- Building awareness and reflection on eco-theology among pastors and congregations.
- Creating space for joint reflection among faith actors on sustainable and just stewardship of natural resources.
- Encouraging and supporting faith actors to undertake joint initiatives to better stewardship of local forest, land, and water resources.
- Supporting faith-based organisations and institutions to develop a green policy for their organisational setting.
- Supporting churches to use their land and forest resources sustainably for biodiversity and income-generating purposes.

The second intervention area, “*Strengthening sustainable, just, and equitable access to and use of natural resources*”, is based on the understanding that the consequences of overshoot are mainly experienced by local communities and Indigenous Peoples in the Global South. They endure displacement, eviction, loss of livelihood, poverty, loss of culture and identity, conflict, violence, and human rights violations due to the quest for land and other natural resources. As a consequence, there is a need for a) increased support for local communities and Indigenous Peoples in protecting and sustainably managing their (remaining) land, forest, and water resources, b) enhanced collaboration with civil society, the private sector, and other actors, c) enhanced efforts to create local job opportunities for local communities and Indigenous Peoples, and d) stronger national and international advocacy for natural resource justice. The programme strategy outlines four sub-intervention areas:

- Supporting natural resource-dependent communities and civil society actors to protect and access natural resources.
- Improving the livelihood and resilience of natural resource-dependent communities.
- Promoting innovative partnerships with private sector actors, tech actors, and research institutions to enhance alternative income opportunities for poor and natural resource dependent communities.
- Protecting and supporting natural resource defenders and fostering linkages between natural resource defenders at the local, national, and international levels.

**Examples of Danmission’s activities:**

- Supporting capacity-building initiatives for local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and local duty-bearers on natural resource rights.
- Monitoring community-based biodiversity, forest crimes, and human rights violations.
- Creating platforms for collaboration across local communities and Indigenous Peoples, and between Indigenous Peoples and other civil society actors, including religious actors.
- Creating linkages between local communities and Indigenous Peoples, civil society actors, including religious actors and academic institutions to advance local communities and Indigenous Peoples’ voices in national and international policy processes.

- Organising natural resource justice campaigns with a point of departure in local issues.
- Undertaking income-generating initiatives and green job creation for local communities and Indigenous Peoples,
- Training youth in innovation, entrepreneurship, and business management, and supporting green start-ups.
- Providing training on regenerative agriculture approaches, smart agriculture, and water-saving techniques.

The third intervention area, “*Preventing and managing natural resource conflicts*”, is based on the insight that conflicts over natural resources are escalating in scope, magnitude, and intensity due to their scarcity and the human quest to exploit them. Local communities and Indigenous Peoples tend to live in areas rich in natural resources and are severely affected by the scramble for resources and the resulting conflicts. Consequently, there is a need to a) enable local communities and Indigenous Peoples to address natural resource conflicts in partnership with other actors, b) create space for dialogue and conflict resolution between natural resource actors, and c) enhance fundamental human rights for local communities and Indigenous Peoples. The programme strategy outlines three sub-intervention areas:

- Supporting natural resource dependent communities and civil society actors to prevent and address natural resource conflicts.
- Fostering dialogue between natural resource actors to build constructive relationships and strengthen cooperation.
- Promoting innovative peacebuilding approaches and partnerships in order to mitigate natural resource conflicts.

**Examples of Danmission’s activities:**

- Supporting capacity-building initiatives for local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and local duty-bearers on dialogue, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.
- Building capacity on and mainstreaming Do No Harm and Active Non-Violence among local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and civil society actors.
- Training local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and civil society actors to analyse and address conflict drivers.

- Supporting dialogue initiatives between local communities, Indigenous Peoples, duty-bearers, and other natural resource actors.
- Creating task forces to address specific natural resource conflicts.

## 5. How Danmission works to further Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources

Danmission’s work to advance Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources takes place at two levels: at the local level in programme countries with local partners, and at the international level, including in Denmark. At the local level, Danmission works with a variety of partners: informal networks, grassroots movements, churches, faith-based actors and organisations, secular civil society organisations, umbrella organisations, academic institutions, and government and private sector actors. The portfolio of partners varies from country to country depending on the context and civil society landscape. At the international level, Danmission cooperates with international organisations, academic institutions, faith-based coalitions, UN agencies, etc..

Danmission’s engagement in the natural resource field dates back to 2014 when Danida awarded Danmission a grant under a call for “Innovative partnerships for civil society” for an initiative titled “It’s Our Forest Too” in the Prey Lang forest in Cambodia (see section 7 for more details). Danmission established a unique partnership between a local network of forest activists (Prey Lang Community Network), a youth movement (Cambodian Youth Network), a peacebuilding organisation (Peace Bridges Organisation), an IT company (Web Essentials) and a university (University of Copenhagen). The initiative has expanded to other forests and increasingly engages with faith-based actors, including churches and monks. The

### The added value of Danmission’s ...

#### Local leadership approach:

- Danmission works with local partners based on mutual respect and shared goals.
- Through local offices in programme countries Danmission navigates directly in the contexts and works closely with its partners.

#### Faith-based approach:

- According to World Population Review about 85% of the world's population identify with a faith. In this context Danmission and its faith-based partners benefit from a broad outreach to large parts of communities through faith-based institutions and actors.
- Danmission and its faith-based partners can sometimes navigate more freely in challenged contexts than other civil society actors.
- Danmission gains trust from both faith-based (of different faith) and non-faith-based actors, which places Danmission in a unique position to facilitate safe spaces across divides.

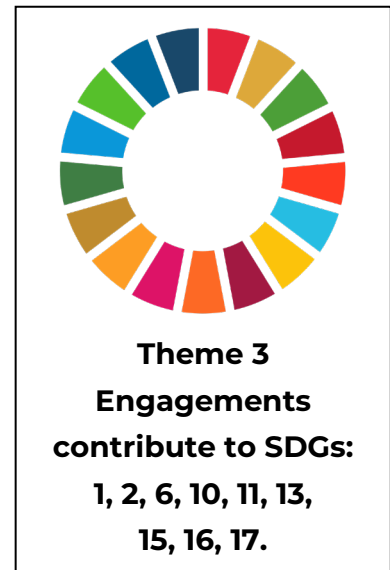
partnership and initiative are ongoing and are inspiring other programme countries, for example, Egypt, Myanmar, and Tanzania.

As a faith-based organisation, Danmission has a particular focus on strengthening the engagement of faith-based actors in natural resource management in programme countries. This contains partly untapped potential, as faith-based actors have massive networks locally, regionally, and globally, and can mobilise followers around specific issues. Danmission seeks to link local faith-based voices with regional and global actors. To this end Danmission is in the process of building a partnership with UNEP's Faith for Earth Initiative. Danmission is also well-positioned to help bridge science-based conservation actors and local faith-based actors.

Local communities and Indigenous Peoples are the key target groups of Danmission's intervention, and in partnership with local and international partners Danmission supports participation in national, regional, and global natural resource policy processes, e.g. in UN Biodiversity Conferences. Danmission also facilitates networking between local communities and Indigenous Peoples at various levels. Local partners play a crucial role in supporting local communities and Indigenous Peoples; they are present in communities, know the local context, and have relationships with rights-holders and duty-bearers. Danmission's presence in programme countries enables close partnerships with local partners, creating a strong foundation for furthering Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources locally and globally.

## 6. Human rights, Gender and Theme 3: Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources

The link between Theme 3 on Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural Resources and human rights is evident, as overshoot and conflicts over access to natural resources pose a danger to humanity and therefore affect a range of human rights for vulnerable people dependent on natural resources. When there is overshoot and conflict over access to natural resources, vulnerable people’s rights are affected, such as the right to water and sanitation (ICESCR), the right to life (ICCPR Art. 6), the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to food (ICESCR Art. 11), and the right to health (ICESCR art. 12). Other rights such as the right to self-determination (ICCPR Art. 1), the right to liberty and security (ICCPR Art. 9), the right to access to justice and fair trial (ICCPR Art. 14 & 15), freedom of religion or belief (ICCPR Art. 18), and the right not to be discriminated based on one’s ethnicity. The religion and language (ICCPR art. 27) of vulnerable peoples are also affected, when there are conflicts over access to natural resources.



Overshoot and conflicts over access to natural resources directly affect gender equality. Women and men have traditionally used natural resources differently, and their gender roles relate to different sets of knowledge and other responsibilities. Ownership of natural resources is predominantly controlled by men, limiting women’s decision-making power. It is essential to integrate a gender perspective when addressing the overshoot symptoms, as the consequences for men and women are experienced differently.

The above-mentioned conventions provide an internationally recognised legal framework for local communities and Indigenous Peoples to assert their rights and advocate for more natural resource justice. These conventions and the rights enshrined in them are essential for local communities and Indigenous Peoples to be aware of. Danmission’s local partners play a crucial role in raising awareness, building the capacity on human rights, and supporting the advocacy of local communities and Indigenous Peoples. The same goes for gender equality.

The Sustainable Development Goals, of which goal 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16 and 17 are particularly relevant in the context of Sustainable and Just Stewardship of Natural

Resources; they can be seen as a general framework for the third theme of Danmission's programme strategy.

**Examples of Danmission's activities:**

- Supporting capacity-building initiatives of local partners on human rights and gender.
- Supporting capacity-building initiatives of local partners on the intersection between human rights, gender, and natural resources.
- Supporting local partners to undertake an in-depth context analysis to inform project interventions.



## 7. Examples of Danmission's work

The “It’s Our Forest Too” initiative is working to improve the stewardship of the Prey Lang forest in Cambodia. Prey Lang is the largest lowland evergreen forest in mainland Southeast Asia, and it has suffered from unprecedented levels of deforestation due to illegal logging. The initiative peacefully promotes responsible forestry stewardship and natural resource management. Over the years, it has resulted in significant changes across the domains of improved capacity, stronger partnerships, and enhanced local leadership. The initiative has succeeded in deterring illegal logging, promoting community-based forest monitoring, improving the resilience of local activists, and linking the lessons learned from Prey Lang to the international community.

Prey Lang Community Network is the core actor in this initiative, which is a network of local communities and Indigenous Peoples working to save the Prey Lang forest from illegal logging and industrial agriculture. Using an app developed specifically for the purpose, the network patrols the forest, records illicit logging and forest conversion within the protected Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary, and reports its findings to policymakers and the general public. The network was formed about twenty years ago.

In the “It’s Our Forest Too” initiative, Danmission acts as a bridge-builder between local communities and Indigenous Peoples (Prey Lang Community Network) and global actors, e.g. academic institutions and UNDP. At the same time, Danmission is a convener, bringing groups and organisations together across traditional divides. This can result in surprising new alliances and innovations in or between countries, sectors, and types of actors. For example, through this initiative Prey Lang Community Network has opened its eyes to what is happening in other forests both inside and outside Cambodia, and has cooperated with the Joint Research Centre of the EU Commission to combine community-based monitoring with remote sensing of deforestation.

The Prey Lang app mentioned above and the unique partnership have received numerous awards:

(2015) UNDP Equator Initiative Prize, COP 21 Paris

(2017) International Society for Tropical Foresters Innovation Prize, Yale University

(2018) University of Copenhagen Innovation Prize

(2019) National Energy Globe Award

(2020) Landscape Hero Title

---

*Approved by the board of Danmission, August 2023.*