UEM Guidelines for Sustainable Construction

1. Justification

Responsibility for God's creation

"As long as the earth endures, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8,22). In accordance with this, God's promise, the UEM, since 2008, has been raising awareness through exhibitions, projects and advocacy work that it is not our human responsibility to destroy the earth. God has given this earth to human beings as living space that is to be preserved. Today, climate change and environmental destruction represent a serious threat to human beings and to nature. Churches within the UEM in Africa, Asia and Germany have responded to this challenge by supporting climate and environmental projects, awareness building and advocacy work." [1]

"In the Christian faith, each of us has a dual role. On the one hand, we are creatures among fellow creatures. But, on the other, each of us was created in the image of God. As human beings, we are able to reflect on who and what we are and the consequences of what we do. We, therefore, bear a special responsibility for nature, for God's creation: the responsibility to cultivate and to preserve the earth in trust."[2]

The UEM is aware of the fact that it is not always possible to consider green (= environmentally friendly, CO^2-neutral) criteria for construction or acquisition. Moreover, the contexts are very different in the countries where UEM members are located. Nevertheless, it is possible to try, and it is important to take first steps. Climate-friendly building, green building has always been possible and may not even cost more than conventional building. It is just a matter of being aware of alternatives: Who would neglect the usefulness of own solar panels on a church owned building? Water is such a valuable resource. It is so easy to include rainwater-harvesting ideas in planning phases of a construction. Recycling: Actually out of all waste, you can do something. Architects experimented to construct houses out of plastic bottles! Just be open and creative and search for solutions to your specific environment! Talk with your contractors they might be very open to become more green themselves.

"Sustainable construction can be described as the search for buildings that provide a balance of the three following perspectives:

- environmental perspective
- social perspective
- economic perspective.

According to this approach, in order to be considered sustainable, buildings must not only be energy efficient or constructed using recycled materials, but also be healthy and

[1] United Evangelical Mission (UEM): Climate Spirituality – Collection of biblical reflection, theological debate, spiritual life, prayer and action from UEM members – https://www.vemission.org/fileadmin/redakteure/Dokumente/JPIC/vem_broschuere_climate_and_spirituality.pdf – Page 2.
[2] Ibid. – Page 13.

comfortable on the inside, as well as being safe and accessible. Costs associated with the construction, maintenance and the building's life cycle ultimately play an important role.

The following list gives some ideas, what could be considered:

1. Managing the project, construction site, building: To organise your project's sustainable management, from construction site to building maintenance.
2. Mobility: To encourage multimodal and sustainable mobility.
3. Developing nature: To integrate nature into the site and improve (urban) living conditions.
4. Physical environment: To limit the impact of the building on its surroundings.
5. Human environment: To encourage social interaction and guarantee housing accessibility for everyone.
6. Materials: To select materials that limit the building's environmental impact throughout its life cycle. Clay, wood, bamboo, recycled materials.
7. Energy: To achieve the highest possible energy performance.
8. Water: To optimise water management.
9. Wellbeing, Comfort & Health: To ensure acoustic, thermal, visual and respiratory comfort."[3]

2. Goal

In promoting Guidelines for Sustainable Constructions the UEM wishes to contribute effectively to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and raise awareness to the following goals:

- SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation
- SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy
- SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth
- SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities
- SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
- SDG 13: Climate action
- SDG 15: Life on land

This is in line with interventions of the UEM for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

2.1 Objectives

The UEM member churches should:

- "Minimize resource consumption (Conserve)
- Maximize resource reuse (Reuse)
- Use renewable or recyclable resources (Renew/Recycle)
- Protect the natural environment (Protect Nature)
- Create a healthy, non-toxic environment (Non-Toxics)
- Pursue quality in creating the built environment (Quality)"[4]

[3] ecobuild.brussels: Sustainable construction – https://ecobuild.brussels/en/sustainable/
[4] Wikipedia: Sustainability in construction – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability_in_construction

2.2 Expected Outcome and Impact

The UEM member churches contribute to achieve SDGs and take active responsibility for God's creation.

3. Guidelines for building projects[5]

1. When planning a building project, climate protection, resource conservation and energy efficiency must be considered from material production and construction through to use and demolition.

2. It should always be checked whether locally available building materials such as earth, wood, bamboo or natural stone can be used sensibly.

3. Already during the planning phase, all possibilities should be exhausted to reduce the overall amount of building materials and to make good use of existing building materials and parts, also through recycling.

4. High quality standards in construction and good maintenance are central to extending the useful life of buildings.

5. Re-use and conversion should always take precedence over demolition and new construction.

6. Needs-based planning requires the participation of future users or their representatives from the same cultural and social environment.

7. Building projects should create job opportunities for disadvantaged groups of the local population, also through labour-intensive techniques. The qualification of young people in particular should be an integral part of construction projects.

8. The health and integrity of all workers in the construction process must be protected, including through strict adherence to safety standards.

Note: The UEM reserves a maximum of 30 % per year of its total project funding for building projects. Preference will be given to project applications that take the above points into account.

[5] Misereor – Positionspapier: Klimagerechtes Bauen – https://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/publikationen/positionspapier-klimagerechtes-bauen.pdf – Page 12.