PRESS RELEASE
30 April 2024

SAFCEI PARTNERS WITH SCAT TO EDUCATE (XXX province) COMMUNITIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

As part of its Earth Month activities, the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) - in partnership with the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT) - hosted community-based organisations (CBOs) and faith leaders from rural communities in the Eastern, Northern and Western Cape, Free State and Limpopo as part of the Rural Action for Climate Resilience (RACR) Learning Festival. The event was held at the Cape Town Lodge from 22 – 24 April (the purpose). This is the third learning festival held within the Rural Action for Climate Resilience project.

SAFCEI Executive Director, Francesca de Gasparis, said "We are looking at issues such as youth and climate action, energy governance, food and land rights. We have a panel discussing faith-leader spiritual responses to climate change. Faith leaders shared how they work globally, at community level, and even at their personal level, to bring about climate resilience and take action to restore and build a climate-friendly future for all."

The RACR learning festival is an opportunity for people in community based organisations to come together and learn about climate change, share ideas for local climate change projects in their communities, and develop strategies to hold the government accountable for the commitments it has made to the people. SAFCEI and SCAT share a common interest in women empowerment and inclusion in the discourse around climate change.

SCAT Executive Director Joanne Harding says the learning festival is a safe space for faith and community leaders to engage on issues related to climate change. Harding says, "The RACR project is not just about learning; it is about implementing projects on the ground. These included projects focused on food, water and energy and adaptation to climate change. The changes we see in communities can be attributed to the learning and empowerment that happens through the RACR project. The Learning Festivals have focused on the participation of women and youth. Women are most vulnerable to climate change and youth will have to live with the effects of climate change."

SAFCEI Climate Policy Coordinator, Tara Nair van Ryneveld says the objective of the RACR learning festival is to increase and build awareness and understanding on climate change in South Africa and how to respond to it. Van Ryneveld says, "The festival was a success and we hope to see the community based organisations take and channel the learnings that they received during the festival into local actions around building climate resilience. We hope that they will use the information that they have received to mobilise and further their engagement with local government, with the intention of building broader climate resilience within their communities."

SCAT has developed a Youth Ambassador for Climate Change programme which will empower the youth on soil preservation and sustainable farming practices to better deal with climate change. The festival participants will get to nominate youth in their communities for the ambassador programme who will be trained and capacitated to return to their communities and reciprocate what they have learned.

SCAT Youth Ambassadors for Climate Change Programme Coordinator, Indiphile Matini, says “We are gearing up for the Youth Ambassador for Climate Change programme which should start around June/July. It is a six-month programme where the participants who are present here today will nominate seven candidates to be trained. They in turn will go back to their communities and train others on what they have learned from the program. The youth will deal with far worse climate change effects than what we are dealing with today and it is important that we not only engage but capacitate the youth for climate resilience.”

Yamkela Luxolo, an Eastern Cape representative from the Mount Frere Paralegal Advice Centre says, “The project has been very eye-opening. I now better understand what climate change really is and what it means for my community and myself. We have learned many practical and purposeful ways of addressing the challenges we face because of climate change. The training and information I have received has empowered and enabled me to also share with others around me. It is an impactful project that connects, educates, and empowers.”

Faith leaders from the Islam, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist and Christian faiths had an opportunity to share and facilitate discussions around the sacredness and preservation of the land; and how the land can sustain the needs of rural communities without severe dependence on money. They also shared information about indigenous food with healing properties as a means to connect with the land and build awareness on climate activism under the slogan ‘Let thy food be thy medicine and let thy medicine be thy food.’

This Learning Festival was made possible by funding from the Embassy of Ireland whose support for the Rural Action for Climate Resilience project has been invaluable in fostering community-based climate action.

END

Other quotes to be used for provincial and community media:
Sofia Booysen of Kgatelopele Social Development Forum in the Northern Cape says “I have learnt quite a lot from the festival. I’ve learned what climate change is and how as individuals and communities we can empower ourselves to better deal with its effects. We have been exposed to things like the solar box stove, which can revolutionise the lives of people who struggle with electricity services or have none.”

Mary Selona, a representative from Bloodriver Advice Office in Limpopo says, “I have had the pleasure of meeting up and collaborating with other like-minded colleagues from different communities who are passionate about preserving the earth and feeding multitudes in a healthy and affordable manner. The festival has taught me that it starts with us individuals and that it is never too late to make a change. Taking care of the land that feeds us was my key takeout. I am definitely going to have a better relationship with the land going forward and will transfer the knowledge back to my community.”

Eugene Mapotolo from Beaufort West Legal Advice & Development Office says, “The festival has taught me a lot about addressing the current challenges faced by my community. I have learned that I can have influence as far as climate change is concerned. It has sharpened my

understanding of our load shedding crisis and the possible, affordable and people-centred solutions.”