Climate Change: Stories of Hope
By Susan Searle

Purpose
This 90-minute session introduces youth to the pressing issue of climate change affecting our planet. However, instead of focusing on the negative and often scary issues around climate change, this session takes a more hopeful and inspiring approach. This session centers on individuals and organizations that are striving to improve environmental conditions and care for God’s creation.

Session at a Glance
7:00 p.m. Welcome / What is Climate Change?
    Watch “What is Climate Change” (see #1 in Prepare in Advance)
7:10 p.m. The Domino Effect of Climate Change
7:30 p.m. Stories of Hope
    Optional: Watch “The Best Speech – Severn Suzuki”
7:45 p.m. How to Be a Story of Hope: Group Presentations
8:00 p.m. Transforming Trash into Art
8:20 p.m. Closing Prayer
8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session Ideas
- Host a recycled art auction for charity. Encourage youth to sell the sculptures they made in this session in a silent auction for charity. Combine the auction with a pot luck dinner and invite the entire parish community to participate.
- Reverse Scavenger Hunt: Instead of having youth collect items for your trash to art activity before the session, incorporate a reverse scavenger hunt into your session. Gather at a local park or school yard and split your group into teams. Have them canvas the area for trash and give points for trash collected. After a specified time limit gather the group and award points to see which group was most effective in cleaning the environment.
  - 6 points – plastic bags and plastic bottles
  - 5 points – soda cans, glass bottles
  - 4 points – for identifiable trash
  - 3 points – for unidentifiable trash
  - 2 points – for cardboard
(Source: NFCYM website, www.nfcym.org)
• Plan a Catholic “youth environmental summit” for your city. Invite all the area youth ministries to make information booths that demonstrate ways to make a difference in the environment. Highlight the themes of Catholic social teaching and how they relate to climate change. Invite all the parishes (bishop too!) to attend! Be sure to invite the local media as well to cover how young people care for the environment.

Materials Needed
• Newsprint
• Boxes of dominos, approximately 100 dominos per each small group of 6-8 participants (ask for volunteers from the youth ministry or from the parish at large to bring these if the parish doesn’t have them)
• Colored index cards
• Markers
• Art materials: hot glue guns and glue sticks (1 per every 4-6 youth), string, colored yarn, scraps of material, - anything lying around that could be considered junk.
• Video, “What is Climate Change?” at http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/students/ (5:00)
• Optional: Video, “The Best Speech – Severn Suzuki” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPx5r35Aymc (6:49)
• Laptop and LCD projector, if showing ‘What is Climate Change?’
• Resource 1, The Domino Effect of Climate Change, copy double-sided, one copy for each small group of 6-8 participants (see #2 in Prepare in Advance)
• Handout 1, Stories of Hope: EcoLogical, one for each person in small group 1
• Handout 2, Stories of Hope: Paper or Plastic, one for each person in small group 2
• Handout 3, Stories of Hope: “Celebrating Creation” Prayer Beads, one for each person in small group 3
• Handout 4, Stories of Hope: Team WIN, one for each person in small group 4
• Handout 5, Stories of Hope: Give Running, one for each person in small group 5
• Handout 6, Stories of Hope: Friends of Nature, one for each person in small group 6
• Optional: CD or MP3 player and recording of nature sounds (ocean waves, birds singing, thunderstorm, etc.)

Prepare in Advance
1. View the short (about five minutes) video What Is Climate Change? prior to the session. Set up your laptop and projector so everyone will be able to see and hear.
2. As the young people are working on their domino course, they may need some additional information regarding some of the effects of climate change. For example, how will climate change increase malaria? We know that the mosquito is going to higher elevations and with more extreme weather, they’re thriving but not sure that the kids will make that connection. Read through the resource sheet and make notes of where your young people may need additional information in order to complete their task.

3. Regarding climate change at the beginning of the session, consider reading the Vatican statement on climate change: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdscien/2011/PA S_Glacier_110511_final.pdf. Consider also listening to the recorded interview of Dan Misleh, Executive Director of Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, with the lead researcher on the Vatican statement on climate change. Use this link: http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/05.10.11- Ramanathan-Interview.mp3.

4. Determine your meeting space. You will need an open area of about 4’ wide by 6’ long for youth to build their domino courses.

5. Send home in advance of your session for youth to bring one large trash bag filled with items that would normally be thrown away. Tell youth to be sure to only bring clean, rinsed-out items. Example items: Empty plastic milk cartons, old toys, boxes, plastic utensils, broken electronics, cans, anything that might be considered “junk.”

6. Set up tables and chairs for small group work. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and nametags. **Hospitality is important:** As the leader, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last-minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

**Session Outline**

**Welcome / What is Climate Change?** (10 minutes)
After greeting and welcoming youth, explain that tonight’s session will be focusing on the urgent issue of climate change and what communities and individuals are doing to improve the situation. The heart of this evening will be stories of hope from the people who are working first hand to improve the environment. Let youth know that they will also be thinking of ways they too can help the environment. Using a sheet of newsprint and a marker to record answers, ask the group to describe the issue of climate change.

After acquiring a few answers from the group, make the following points:

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• Climate change is occurring globally.
• Scientists believe that, as the climate warms, stronger and more frequent weather events such as storms and droughts will result in greater loss of property and life.
• Scientists believe that the melting of our mountain glaciers impacts those who depend on the water supply from glaciers and those facing rising sea levels and stronger storm surges.
• Global warming is caused by an excess of greenhouse gases. These excess gases come from a variety of sources but mostly from burning fossil fuels.

Show the short film “What is Climate Change?” to help participants understand what the term means and to see some examples.

**The Domino Effect of Climate Change** (20 minutes)
Divide participants into groups of six to eight. Give each group 100 dominos (each group will need the same amount of dominos), note cards, markers and a copy of Resource 1, The Domino Effect of Climate Change. Explain to participants they will be building a dominos course (with dominos standing on end). They will also be using their index cards, a marker, and the directions on Resource 1. Their task will be to illustrate with their domino course how climate change has a domino effect on creation. Inform youth that they will only have ten minutes to set up their courses so they will need to work together quickly. Challenge them to ask questions about the causes or effects of climate change if they don’t know them (e.g., if they ask why malaria is on the effects list, it is because the mosquito population has moved to higher elevations and is flourishing).

*Note to Leader:* Tell youth not to topple their domino courses until you give the word! Once everyone has completed the task, invite each group to share and explain how they built their course. Next, youth can topple their dominoes (start with first domino) to simulate how the climate change affects the planet. If the domino course stops, feel free to help the course by knocking down the domino that broke the flow to continue the simulation.

Ask the entire group:

• What did you learn about climate change from this activity?
• How connected to the environment are human beings?
• How does human activity affect the environment?

**Stories of Hope** (15 minutes)
Ask youth if they know that our present pope is often called “the Green Pope.” Share with youth the following information about the Church:
In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI and his leadership spearheaded renewable energy projects right in Vatican City by installing 2,400 solar panels atop the pope’s audience hall, which prevents 230 tons of carbon dioxide from being emitted annually.

In the pope’s first social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), he proclaimed there is a “covenant” between humans and the environment, and “responsibility is a global one, for it is concerned not just with energy but with the whole of creation, which must not be bequeathed to future generations depleted of its resources.” He highlighted in particular the responsibility of wealthy developed nations to take the lead on these efforts.

Other Catholic organizations taking the lead in this issue are The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Catholic Relief Services.

Next, share with youth that they will be learning about different people and organizations who are working to help combat the negative effects of climate change. Begin by showing the YouTube video, “The Best Speech – Severn Suzuki.” Then engage them in reflecting on what they heard and saw by asking them the following questions:

- For whom/what is Severn advocating? Who/What are the groups most affected by climate change?

- She says, “If you don’t know how to fix it, please stop breaking it.” “If a child on the streets who has nothing is willing to share, why are we who have everything so greedy?” To whom would you address these questions?

- She advocates for money which is currently spent on war being spent instead on protecting the environment. How would you argue for this position?

- Where is the hope in her message? How hopeful are you that we can solve the problem of global warming?

Ask youth to return to their small groups (or divide them into new groups). Give each member of a group one of the handouts to read over and discuss (Handout 1 to group #1, etc.). Tell groups that they are going to do a presentation to the rest of the participants based on the information from their handout. They are to share the information they learned and also come up with ways their youth ministry could do a similar thing in their community. Presentations could be in the form of a skit, a poster, or some other creative idea.

*Note to Leader:* If you have more than six small groups, use the CRS stories attached for more examples.

**How to be a Story of Hope: Group Presentations** (15 minutes)

Invite participants back into the large group and invite each small group to share its presentation. Then conclude with the following:
The stories you have just shared give all of us hope in our quest to care for God’s creation and reduce the negative effects which our lifestyles have on the environment.

**Transforming Trash into Art** (20 minutes)
Use the “junk” students brought to this session. Invite youth to make sculptures that look like either people or animals. Their sculptures should represent those who ultimately will be most affected by climate change. Youth can use either hot glue, masking tape, or string to attach things together.

**Art Show** (5 minutes)
Have youth display their sculptures for all to see. Consider displaying their artwork in the parish center, gathering space before Masses, etc.

**Closing Prayer: Guided Meditation** (5 minutes)
*Note to Leader:* If possible, have youth go outside for this meditation or use a CD recording of nature sounds (ocean waves, birds singing, thunderstorm, etc.) for background to the guided meditation.

**Gather**
Prayer Leader: *(begin with the Sign of the Cross)*

**Loving God,**
We ask your blessings upon us and upon the beautiful earth which you have entrusted to our care. Help us to be better stewards of that earth. Give us the wisdom and the hope that we need to leave our world in better shape than we received it. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus and in Your Spirit. Amen.

**Listen**
Before beginning the meditation ask everyone to sit comfortably, take a deep breath, and close their eyes.

Read slowly…pause between the lines.

*As we close our time together, let us reflect on what you have seen, heard and experienced about climate change in this session.*

*With your eyes closed, take a deep breath...*  
*Allow yourself to release any tension you may feel in your body...*  
*Breathe in and be at peace...*  
*Use your mind to imagine a forest... a mountain... the ocean...*  
*Imagine places in nature that heal your spirit...*  
*Notice how you feel close to God in nature...*  
*Nature helps us to recognize God’s presence...*  
*For God, there is no separation between spirituality and creation...*  
*God is everywhere...*
God is in the air we breathe…
God is in the water we drink…
God is within you…
Nature: The tree, the animals, the ocean, all of nature is an essential teacher of our spirituality…
We need access to clean flowing rivers to remember that our lives continually flow on…
We need a green forest with majestic pines to remember that our faith is ever-growing…
We need the beauty of a clear still lake to remember that God sees right through to our soul…
We need the vastness of the world’s oceans to remind us that God’s love is everywhere…
We need to look into another person’s eyes to remember that we are all loved by our creator…
We are part of nature…
Nature is part of who we are…
When nature suffers, we suffer too…
We are responsible to care for God’s creation…
We are called to be stewards of this planet…
Imagine a world where there is no trash littered on the road…
Imagine a world where the sky is always bright blue and not hazy from pollution…
Imagine a world where people across the globe aren’t suffering from the effects of pollution because the air is clean and fresh…
Imagine a world where the fish and sea life do not have to swim in waters polluted with oil…
Imagine a world where many animal natural habitats are not disappearing…
Imagine our world clean the way God created it to be…
Imagine our world where there are resources for all people…
Imagine our world where everyone breathes clean air and drinks clean water…
Now see yourself as part of that world…
Take a few minutes and listen to how God may be calling you to care for the planet…

Pause for a few moments then guide participants slowly from their meditation. Take your time leading youth to open their eyes and move their bodies.

**Respond**

Invite participants to journal on the following question: What is God calling me to do to care for the earth, its resources, and its people?

Ask participants to share with the large group one thing they can commit to doing as a result of their journal reflection.

**Go Forth**

End with the following:

Thank you, God, for loving us so much that you gave us the earth on which to live. We praise you for your awesome creation and we ask you to give us the strength and the conviction to live up to our commitments.
We pray together:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

All websites and links mentioned in this session were accessed successfully on June 23, 2011.

Susan Searle is adjunct faculty for the Center for Ministry Development’s Certificate in Youth Ministry Studies Program, YouthLeader, and Just5Days programs. Susan is also an Ambassador for the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, and available to give presentations, workshops, and retreats on this important issue to your parish youth ministry. Contact her at: smsearle@msn.com.
The Domino Effect of Climate Change

Your challenge:
Set-up a dominos course that illustrates the effects of climate change on creation. As a group, choose a cause of climate change from the list provided below. Then, discuss and choose some of the possible effects related to the cause your group chose. Using your marker, label a note card with each of the causes and effects. Next, begin to set up your dominos course so that your causes are connected to the effects. For about every ten dominos, place a note card with one of the effects written on it. For example, deforestation (place 10 dominos) destroys habitats for animals (more dominos), causes animals to migrate (more dominos), and causes erosion of the land (dominos).

Continue building your course until you use all your dominos. You may also connect other causes and effects to your original cause.

Helpful hints for setting up your course:
1. When setting up dominos in a straight line, leave a space about the width of one domino between the dominos.
2. When setting up dominos in a curved line, leave less than half an inch between each domino.
3. Set up dominos in groups of ten, then leave some space and set up another group.
4. When the course is almost finished, fill the spaces in between. By leaving space, if a domino is accidentally knocked down during setup, all the dominos in the course won’t be knocked over.
5. REMEMBER: you only have 10 minutes to set-up your course.

Causes and Effects: Choose several different causes and effects of climate change, and write them on a separate note card to be used in your domino course. You may use a cause and effect more than once in your course. As a group, decide how to illustrate climate change by connecting different causes and effects together in a domino course.

Some Possible Causes of Climate Change:
- Burning of fossil fuels
- Decomposition of waste in landfills
- Overconsumption
- Deforestation
- Use of fertilizers
- Carbon dioxide emissions

Some Possible Effects of Climate Change:
- Decreased snow pack
- Rising sea levels
- Flooding
- Drought
- More severe storms
- Water shortages
- Extreme heat waves
- Loss of biodiversity
- Threatened cultures
- Species extinction
- Reduced growing seasons
- Loss of crops

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental Issue</th>
<th>Social Impact</th>
<th>Economic Impact</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erosion of roads</td>
<td>Hurricanes</td>
<td>Heavy rains</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melting ice caps</td>
<td>Decreased stream flow</td>
<td>Landslides</td>
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<td>Spread of disease</td>
<td>Malaria</td>
<td>Lack of safe drinking water</td>
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<td>Loss of family income</td>
<td>Climate change refugees</td>
<td>Loss of livestock</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malnutrition</td>
<td>Coastal flooding</td>
<td>Bleaching of coral reefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wildfires</td>
<td>Earthquakes</td>
<td>Migration of animals disrupted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of employment</td>
<td>Death of marine life</td>
<td>Extinction of some species</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of housing</td>
<td>More diseases</td>
<td>Food becomes more expensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Typhoons</td>
<td>Loss of rain forest</td>
<td>Desertification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of essential pollinators</td>
<td>Loss of soil organisms</td>
<td>Decreased grain yields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger</td>
<td>Lack of education</td>
<td>Unusable farming land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased cost of housing</td>
<td>More global poverty</td>
<td>Mudslides</td>
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Stories of Hope: EcoLogical

When we started our project in a small town called Homer, Alaska, we had no possible notion of what we were actually getting ourselves into. We were simply four young teenage girls truly wanting to alter the way our town was living. We wanted to see change, both in family homes and the general public.

We got our local middle school lunchroom to switch from using polystyrene trays to reusable plastic trays. We also introduced a “Tin Bin” to our local landfill, and we held a community-wide “Trash into Fashion” show.

Then we won the President’s Environmental Youth Award and suddenly we were going to Washington, DC, to accept our award. Before the awards ceremony, we got to talk with Lisa Jackson, the Administrator of EPA. She was authentically interested in what we did, and what we had to say. The award ceremony itself blew my mind. All of the winners stood in front of the White House on risers. President Obama simply walked around the corner. He was sincere, talking to us as one completely normal person might talk to another, as if he had forgotten that he was the president, and was simply a friend. He talked of how great our accomplishments were, and also of how important it was that we didn’t stop here, that we kept going, because “we are the future.” Each and every winner shook his hand, and got to look him in the eye. I wanted to talk, to thank him for his hard work, to chat about the world, and to ask what being the president of the United States is like, but even if I had the chance, I don’t know if I would have been able to get the words out. I was in awe.

About the author: Hannah Baird is a middle school student from Homer, Alaska. Hannah, along with one high school student and two other middle school students, recently received recognition for their environmental EcoLogical project.

Stories of Hope: Paper or Plastic?

One day in my Global Environmental Issues class, a professor showed us a video on the floating island of plastic in the Pacific Ocean, commonly called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. I never knew the trouble that the convenient plastic bag could cause. On that day I decided to make a change in my life to reduce my contribution to the garbage patch and my carbon footprint in general. I wanted to do something productive to make a difference. I decided to stop using plastic bags. It may be a small step but at least it’s a step in the right direction. By switching to reusable bags I became a little greener and much happier.

I bought my first bag on Earth Day 2007 and I haven’t looked back. Now I use that bag and the few others I have accumulated every time I buy groceries or take a trip to the mall. Being a very poor college student, I never need more than one or two reusable bags when I shop. Those few bags carry for me about the same amount approximately seven plastic bags would hold — not to mention they are foldable and fit into my purse that I carry everywhere.

Now, with my reusable bags, I am helping the planet and making my walk to the apartment with the groceries much easier. Let’s face it: Two bags are easier to manage than seven that have a tendency to rip and tear. Next time a cashier asks you, “Paper or plastic?” say, “Neither!” and pull out your reusable shopping bag instead.

About the Author: Ashley White is a current undergraduate student at Virginia Tech. She is interning with OCHPEE for the summer.

Source: “Paper or Plastic,” Tuesday, July 28, 2009 at: http://blog.epa.gov/blog/category/studentsforclimateaction/
Permission requested.
Stories of Hope:  
“Celebrating Creation” Prayer Beads

The Earth Care ministry of St. John Fisher Chapel University Parish in Troy, Michigan designed “Celebrating Creation” prayer beads to encourage its members “to give glory and praise to our God, who made the heavens and the earth.”

Each of the clay beads, full of color and light, was hand made by a member of the Earth Care ministry before being strung together like a bracelet and assembled in a small pouch. Prayer suggestions and a poem are included with each set of beads, which are used as a reminder to act and pray on behalf of creation; as a tool in prayerful meditation, walking, or sitting in nature; and as a way to connect environmental concerns with justice, peace, and nonviolence throughout all creation.

Sample meditations included with the beads guide individuals and groups to focus their prayer in three areas:

1. gratitude for the gifts of the Earth, and the precious gift of life,
2. a form of destruction that is occurring, such as clear-cutting of forests, species extinction, toxic chemical pollution, global warming, etc., and ways to promote the healing of the earth such as advocacy, recycling, carpooling, land restoration, etc.

The beads have been instrumental in helping members of the community gain a deeper sense of oneness with all of creation, and integrate their prayer lives with action to protect and restore creation. The Earth Care Ministry has sold over 200 sets of the prayer beads since April 2004. They are available online.

Source: http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/real-stories/pray/celebrating-creation-prayer-beads
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Stories of Hope: Team WIN

Sixteen-year-old Alex Lin is committed to solving the international e-waste dilemma. To call the work of Rhode Island teen Alex Lin impressive would be an understatement. This 16-year-old first learned about the environmental problems associated with e-waste after stumbling upon a 2004 Wall Street Journal article on the subject.

Since then, he and his student-led community service team, Team WIN, have overseen the recycling of 300,000 pounds of e-waste, successfully lobbied the Rhode Island state legislature to pass a statewide bill banning the dumping of e-waste, created media centers in developing countries using refurbished computers, secured grants to fund the projects, and created a national PSA on the subject of e-waste.

The 2006 bill banning the dumping of e-waste set the stage for a more stringent extended producer responsibility (EPR) bill passed in 2008. “Now Rhode Island requires manufacturers to take back their computers and televisions and to pay for the collection and recycling of them,” said Sheila Dormody of Clean Water Action.

Connections that Lin made in international conferences and competitions made it possible for the WIN Network to go global, with satellite WIN Teams in Cameroon, the Philippines, Mexico, Kenya, and Sri Lanka. “I would like to tell youth to reuse whatever you can, and upgrade instead of buying something new. Every little bit counts towards helping the environment!” – Alex

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Stories of Hope: Give Running

Greg Woodburn had been a competitive track and cross country runner since elementary school, competing in multiple national championships, when an injury suddenly derailed him his freshman year of high school.

Unable to race, he realized in its absence just how much he loved the sport. In his words, “while running is hard, not running is harder.” While injured, he began to think of underprivileged kids who couldn’t enjoy the great sport of running—not because of injury, but because they couldn’t afford running shoes.

At just 15-years-old, he started Give Running in 2006, a nonprofit organization that collects and donates used running shoes, in good condition, to underprivileged youth and orphans.

By the end of the first year, he was able to collect and clean-up more than 500 pairs of running shoes, which were sent to kids in inner-city Los Angeles, as well as oversees to Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya.

“The feedback from youth in Africa has been especially moving for me. Not only were these the first running shoes any of them had owned, but they were the also first [pair of] shoes many of them had ever had,” writes Greg.

The organization has donated shoes to additional countries including Liberia, Mali, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. More than 6,000 pairs of shoes have been donated as of March 2010, exercising the reach of reuse at its finest.

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Resource 6

Stories of Hope: Friends of Nature

Twelve-year-old Indonesian student Adeline Tiffanie Suwana had great care and concern for the environment after seeing the effects of natural disasters and flooding on her country.

She learned about the importance of mangroves in preventing damage during natural disasters and decided to do something to improve mangrove conditions.

She began by forming a community of young people called Sahabat Alam, which means “Friends of Nature.” The community is now comprised of 1,700 members throughout Indonesia.

Adeline organizes students to plant coral reefs, help with fish breeding and turtle protection, plant mangrove trees, and engage in environmental cleanups and education activities.

Adeline and Sahabat Alam also operate the Electric Generator Water Reel project where they connect remote villages to an electric grid, providing potential economic growth to villagers and improving health and education facilities. They utilize clean renewable energy (hydro) to power these villages.

Her ideas have been presented in schools, with cooperation of governmental agencies and have led to the production of a television program on the subject. She was invited as a delegate by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to the 2009 Tunza International Children’s Conference and awarded the 2009 Action for Nature International Young Eco-Hero award for her efforts.

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