



River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network

For Peoples, Oceans and Forests



The Pacific Ocean, covering one-third of the planet's surface, is the largest climate determinant on Earth. Oceania and Asia share a common image in the 'River Above'—the Pacific Ocean is the current of life and the river of Asia feeding all rivers, seasons, and lives. The surface area and ocean currents absorb energy and generate thermals and other air flows, forming the weather patterns and events while sustaining their movement westward with the jet stream. This close relationship of water and land forms the climate as one large biome of interaction that continues to flow west, picking up from the Indian Ocean and affecting Africa and the rest of the globe. This flow is life-giving and life-taking, especially as the climate is changing, biodiversity is being lost, and resources are being exhausted. The welfare of the lands and peoples is inextricably linked to the welfare of the seas. The traditional and Indigenous Peoples of these islands and countries are daily connected with biodiversity, and are very sensitive to changes and so hold much of the knowledge needed for adaptation but also call for greater climate action from the consumption centers of the world.



A sharp contrast in Bihar, India | A heatwave alert has been issued for a portion of the eastern state of Bihar, while rainfall and floods, strong winds, and lightning are predicted for another. According to experts, these conflicting conditions are rare and can be related to climate change contributing to the persistence of La Niña.

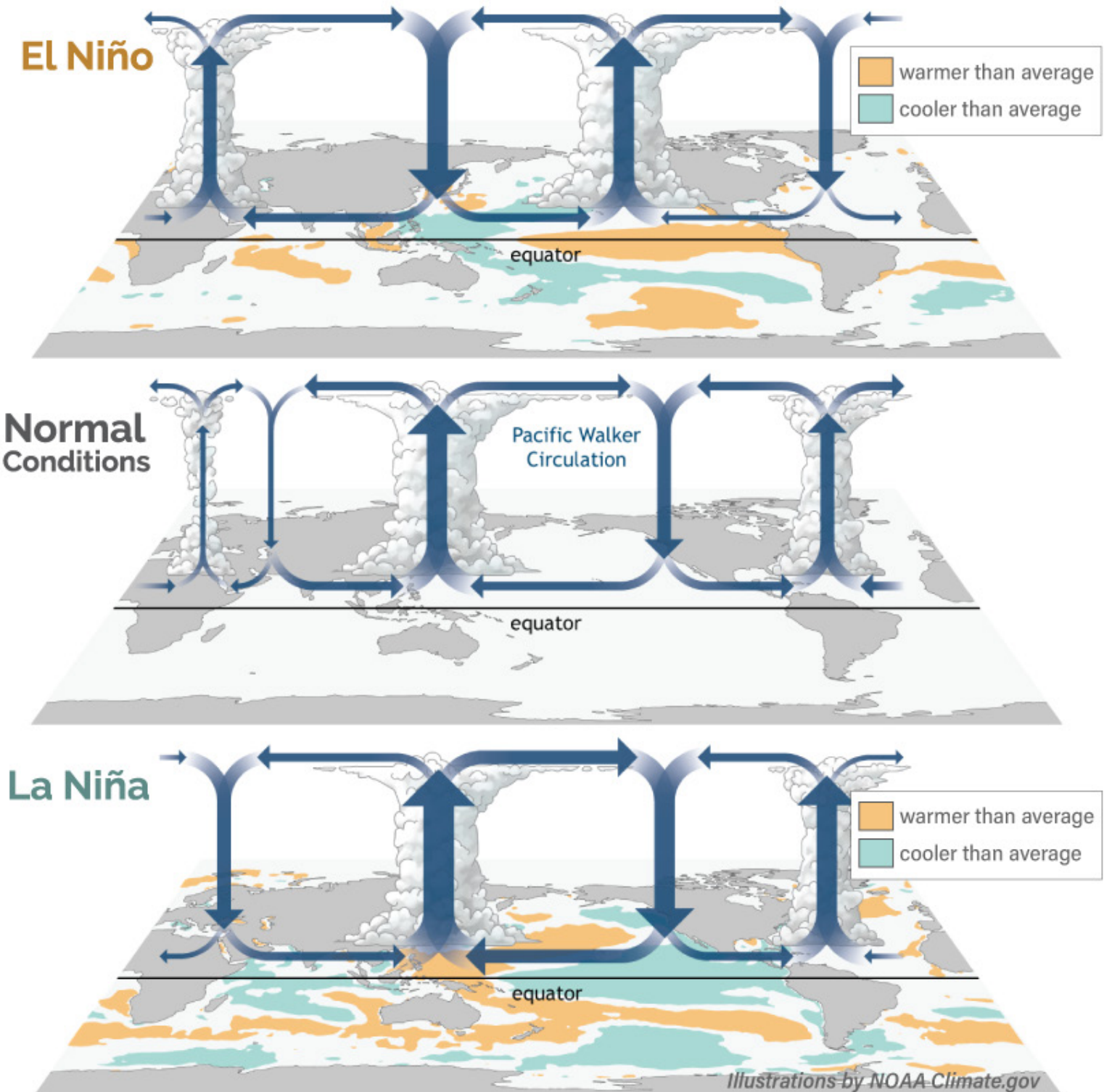
Photo by Atul Pandey on Unsplash

El Niño-La Niña is a natural phenomenon linked with the oscillation of the southern pole (ENSO). Climate change has made this more pronounced to the point of becoming more exaggerated and more extreme in its impact. To explain the weather patterns today and wet months becoming dry and vice versa, there is a need to understand this larger picture for the region. For the last three years, there has been an "extended" La Niña, what does this mean?

In Oceania and Asia, La Niña events lead to more widespread drought conditions. This is because the winds that normally bring moisture from the Pacific Ocean across the region are weaker during La Niña years. This is having a devastating effect on agricultural communities, as crop yields are reduced and water supplies dwindle. Droughts are particularly devastating in atolls that lack adequate rainwater storage capacity. La Niña can also cause problems for fishermen, as fish stocks decline in areas where the water is cooler than normal. In addition, La Niña can lead to increased numbers of floods in other parts of the biome, and these are doubly devastating when they happen during the harvest times.

The effects of La Niña are not always seen as negative, however. "Good weather", meaning no rain, may be appreciated for tourism in some places, and if people have airconditioning, it does not affect urban office work conditions. However, when drought conditions accelerate, the long-term possibilities, particularly in the lowlands, are overwhelmingly negative. Some areas and communities may benefit from improved water supply as glaciers recede or rainfall increases, but this is all in the short term. On the other hand, a greater amount of rainfall may cause more runoff, at least in the upper reaches of some river basins, but in terms of more frequent and damaging floods and mudflows as well as increased water pollution, such vulnerabilities in terms of seasonality demand much greater adaptation and mitigation than in the past.

Climate Change and La Niña in Oceania and Asia



The interaction between the atmosphere and the ocean during La Niña alters global weather patterns and can cause shifts in the path of mid-latitude jet streams in ways that intensify rainfall or drought in regions. In this respect, the tropics suffer most, and in temperate climates, the initial temperature shift or rainfall might be welcome. However, this is an unwelcome sign, especially for areas already deep in drought. (1) The jet stream, or higher atmospheric air flows, is affected by the warming climate and gives direction to storms. If the jet stream weakens, it could allow storms to linger in one place longer, which would also enhance the effects of La Niña.

(1) Earth Observatory, NASA

As global warming exacerbates the impact of La Nina, current ecological problems worsen, and the risk of greater instability and vulnerability increases.



"The ocean is probably the most important part of the planet that we need to care for. This is one area that we must put a lot of investment in: caring for the ocean." *Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, President of the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania*



"Free, prior, informed consent (FPIC) in Papua New Guinea is a novel concept. Many are unaware of what FPIC is or yet, it is not discussed, so there will be numerous human rights issues in many [mining] development areas." *Samantha Kuman, Advocacy Officer, The Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights*



Balancing resource extraction methods in Beluu Chaung, a lake in Pekhon, proved to be very helpful for the fishermen who had previously lost their livelihood due to the unsustainable practice of electro-shocking *Agnes Aye Min Thant, a Kayan living in Pekhon, Myanmar*



"In our mother language, we don't have the word for registration or land grabbing. We cannot grab the land because we belong to the land; the land does not belong to us. This is our world view." *Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary of the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum*



"The health of our soil, water, and the security of our food are at stake, as the increasing high-yield variety corn farming in the uplands has introduced glyphosate and other herbicides in our food systems and land, leading to health and ecological concerns. This is a concern that needs to be emphasized more as it also adversely impacts biodiversity, and our way of life." *Jason Menaling, Pulangiyeen forester at the Forest, Farm, and Leadership in the Margins (FFLM-APC)*

"The Pacific is at the forefront of climate action, not just because we are on the front lines of climate change. Our indigenous framework and traditional wisdom allow us and have allowed us to build sustainable societies. Any network that seeks solidarity within our region must recognize the potency of this heritage and amplify it for the world's benefit." *Aumatagi Joseph Sapati Moeono-Kolio, Greenpeace head of the Pacific*

The Social Centre promotes ecology-based sustainable development and empowers people especially women by connecting them with integrated watershed development programs in the drought-prone Ahmednagar district and the surrounding districts of Maharashtra. The Centre advocates environmental conservation and regeneration, organic farming with soil conservation, multiple intercropping patterns for food security, natural solar energy and eco-education. *Siju Varghese SJ, Social Centre of Ahmednagar,*

Through the practice of "forest ordination," trees are deemed as sacred and people are prohibited from cutting and destroying ordained trees. Engaging in networking through forest ordination activities enables people from different faith and cultural backgrounds to share their stories and experiences, thereby promoting the exchange of best practices in forest protection. *Somnuek Sriphornphunsawat, Emmaus Center, Chiang Mai*



"Our waters were contaminated with toxins and pollutants as a result of industries which continue unabated today. And the quality of the water was degraded, which led to the destruction of our traditional fishing and the knowledge that comes from the river." *Sister Makareta Tawaroa, Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart*



Local authorities are not capable in handling the COVID crisis. They have limited medical devices and they do not have contingency plans when someone gets infected. They also do not provide masks. Local authorities also implemented measures that increased the risks [of transmission] such as distributing cash aid and staple food to crowds without the proper health protocols - *Yeni Kristanti, Sawa Erma Parish*

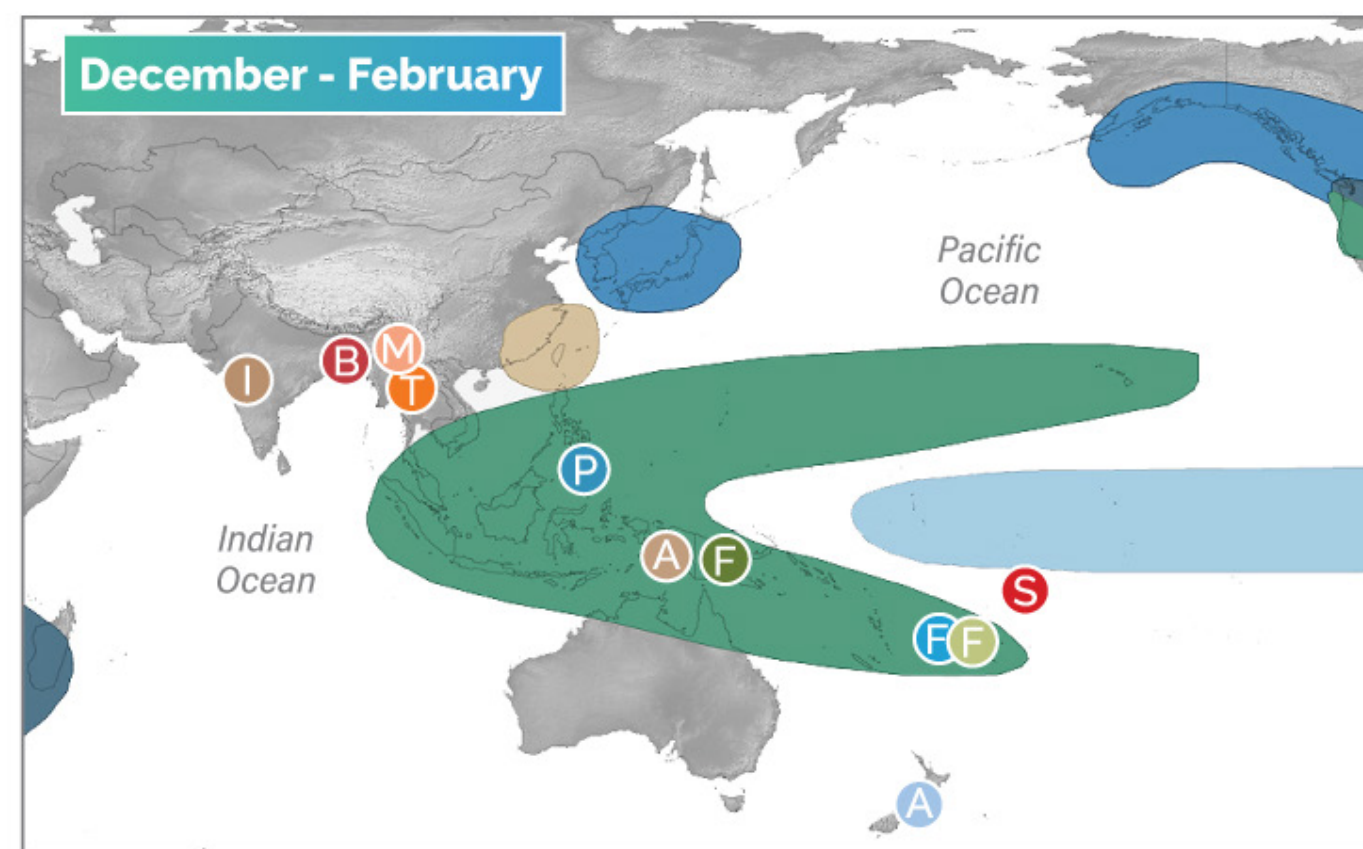
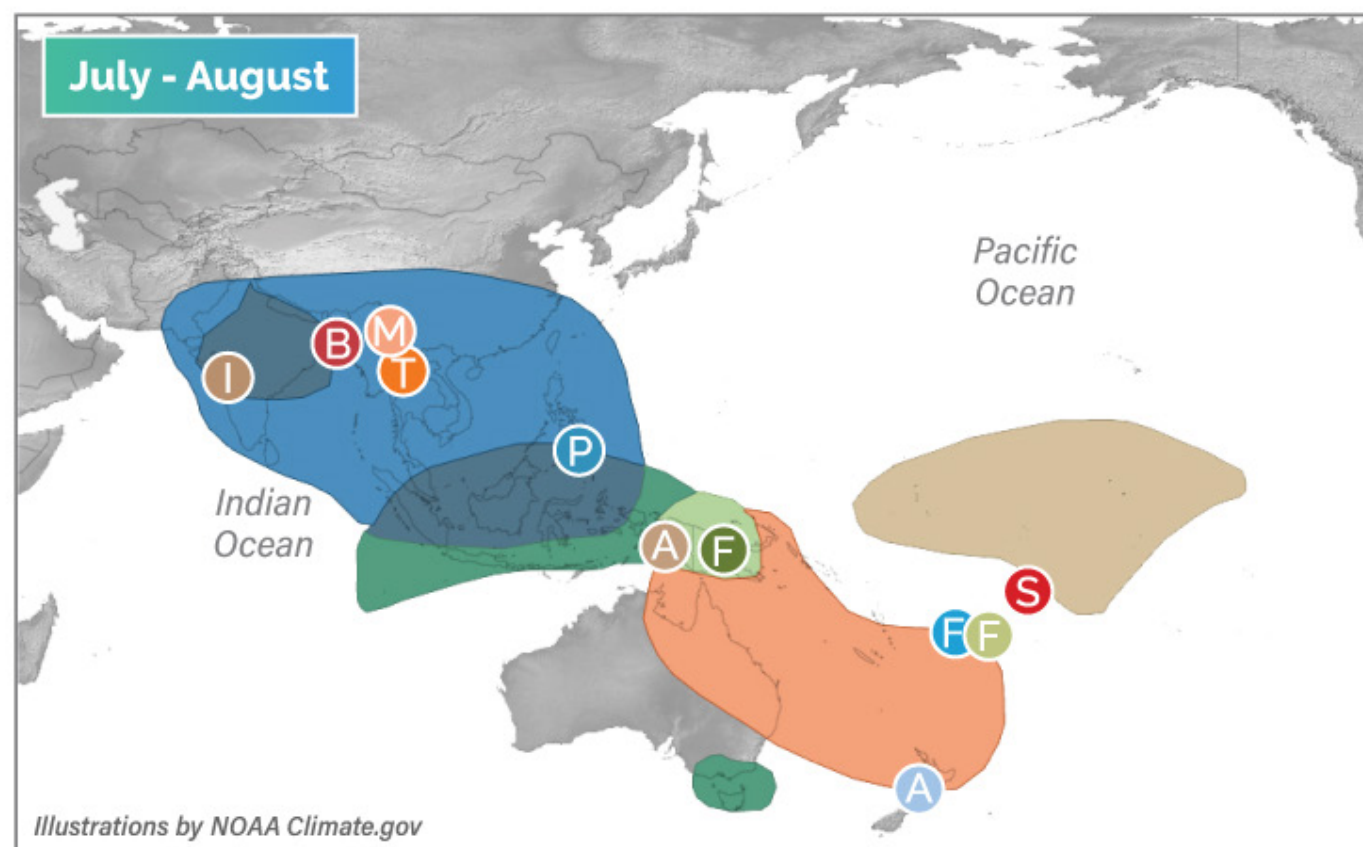


"[Black sand] mining has caused aggravation in our marine life in the shoreline areas, and there is disappearance of many sea and mangrove species. Today, our people have to hire fiberglass boats to fish in deep waters, because they can no longer catch fish in the shallow or mangrove swamps. The availability of livelihood in marine life by the mangrove and shoreline areas to fend for our families are no longer plentiful, because our river is being disturbed. Women above all suffer the consequences as they are largely dependent on fishing, crabbing and collecting seashells as their livelihood." *Mariana Tevurega, Marist sister in Fiji*

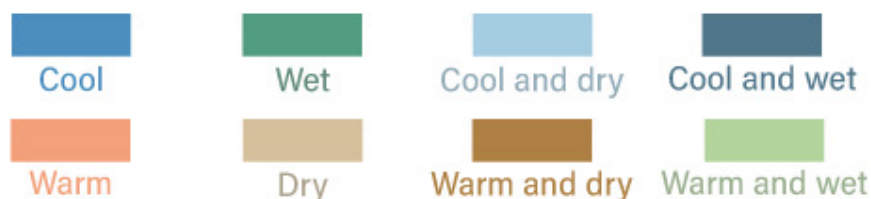
Locate these tags on the Climate Impact Maps on Page 5

These voices working with marginalized communities are juxtaposed on the La Nina climate impacts map on Page 5 to create a visual reference to the context and nuance of the risks these communities face on a daily basis. RAOEN is seeking to create a more robust platform for communicating these risk narratives in multimedia formats in order to increase community and institutional engagement at the local and regional levels, as well as to motivate integrated and greater action on the ground.

La Niña Climate Impacts



Legend



Reflections on Forests, Oceans and Cultures

How can the Catholic Church in Oceania and Asia listen to the life and concerns of ocean, coastal, and forest peoples, enabling their voices to be heard? The ecclesial network proposes four ways in which we can come together as people and as Church.

Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is a way to connect with diverse peoples in the region, taking part in the common mission of caring for Creation and neighbor. Catholics may only be 3% of the region's population, yet being part of the local culture gives us an opportunity to accompany and respond to those most in need.

Discernment as Voices of Conscience

As Church, we are challenged to listen from the ground up and build bridges with all faiths to respond to the concerns of indigenous and vulnerable communities across the region in the context of growing disasters, the need to build back better, reduce all forms of vulnerability and sustain the rich biodiversity of these oceans and lands.

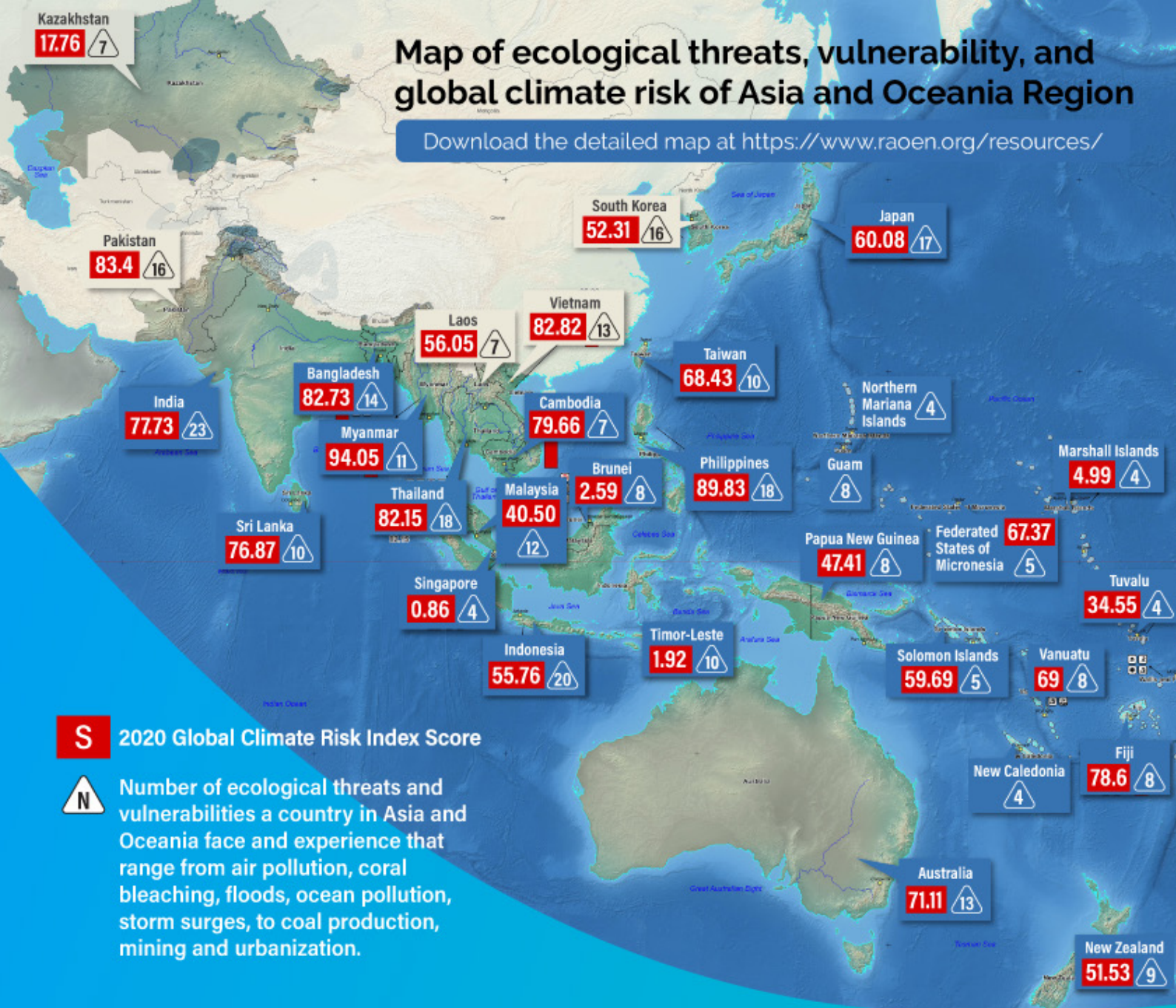
Dreams of a stable climate and a balanced oikos

How do we understand the challenges to climate justice given the diverse context of the megabiome? How can we create a unified voice and re-echo this to those who seek greater climate action? Our dream of a stable climate and a sustainable world is possible only if the oikos of economics and ecology are balanced as one household. Our global economic system has to promote and learn to thrive within the ecology of our planet. We can only do this together if we have a depolarized techno-society where trust and the common good share in one fragile reality.

Deeds

To prepare the ecclesial network to respond to the challenges of this decade of greater action, RAOEN seeks to map the existing initiatives of indigenous and ecology networks that exist or have existed in the region. This can be the basis for setting up a clearing house of information and for creating space to come together in a meaningful open dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of caring for our common home.

The ecclesial network continues to support the work of its network partners, the Amazon Synod and other regional ecclesial networks, who are accompanying Indigenous Peoples, local communities and the youth and providing these voices diverse opportunities to be heard globally at this critical time.



The River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN) seeks to serve the dialogue of integral living so that broader collaboration is possible and the breadth and integrity of the ecology or biome and territory are maintained. The Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) accompanies 16 small island states in Oceania, as well as Papua New Guinea, Australia, and New Zealand. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is on the ground in six countries spanning the Mekong River Basin; five countries in the Himalayas, including the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India; four countries covering the Sundaland; and the island nations of Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. The stories from the local people and the diversity of communities are a fundamental expression of how we need to listen to each other and work together in faith as we build the network.

To learn more about the network, visit: <https://www.raoen.org/>

Get in touch! We'd love to hear from you. Email us at raoensecretariat@gmail.com

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