



The River Above

Volume 4
Issue 8
February
2025

The Quarterly Newsletter of the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network
(RAOEN)

raoen.network@gmail.com

<https://www.raoen.org/>

For peoples, oceans and forests

Climate Vulnerability among Indigenous Peoples' Communities¹

Pedro Walpole | Network Coordinator



Pedro Walpole and James Pochury during their visit in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Climate change poses existential threats to indigenous communities across diverse regions. The document illuminates four critical themes: the alarming escalation of extreme weather events, the inexorable rise of sea levels, the mounting stress on fragile ecosystems, and the profound disruption of traditional agricultural practices. These challenges are not merely environmental; they are deeply intertwined with the cultural fabric and spiritual ethos of indigenous peoples.

The document emphasizes the urgent need for a paradigm shift in climate resilience strategies. It calls for a sacred integration of ancestral wisdom recognizing that indigenous knowledge is not just valuable, but essential.

To address these complex issues, the document proposes holistic, culturally grounded solutions that honour and elevate indigenous knowledge. These include revitalizing time-honored coastal management practices, embracing indigenous land guardianship techniques, and weaving cultural rituals and practices into the fabric of disaster preparedness strategies while promoting the rich cultural heritage of indigenous communities.

¹Excerpt from the presentation by Pedro Walpole at the Asian Forum on "Celebrating Synodality & Indigenous Living Traditions in the Asian Church."

In this issue:

Climate Vulnerability among Indigenous Peoples' Communities	1
Situation and Struggle: Ancestral Domain in Today's World	2
The Treaty of Waitangi: A Covenant?	3
Getting to know RAOEN's Sub-regional Coordinator for Southeast Asia	3
Indigenous Voices Against Power Players: The Namosi Community	4
RAOEN Journeys with the Integral Ecology Group of Diocese of Malaybalay	5
Book Launch of a Faithful Presence, Stories from the LCM Mission in Tonga	5
Building Ecclesial Networks and Prophetic Voices for the Kingdom in Asia	6
Social and Pastoral Works of Local Community	7
Synodality in Action	7
Upcoming Events and Conferences	8

Please consider contributing to our quarterly newsletter. Email us at raoen.network@gmail.com

The policy recommendations call for a fundamental restructuring incorporating indigenous perspectives. The document calls for substantial investment in community-driven adaptation projects and pushes for the integration of indigenous knowledge into national and international climate strategies. It emphasizes the critical need for the recognition of indigenous rights as a cornerstone of global climate policy.

The research agenda calls for in-depth studies on the long-term effects of climate change on indigenous practices, rigorous evaluation of traditional adaptation strategies, and innovative exploration of how local knowledge can be seamlessly integrated into climate modelling and broader adaptation efforts.

In essence, this document is about the resilience, wisdom, and vital importance of indigenous communities in the face of climate change.

It challenges us to reimagine our approach to climate adaptation, one that honours the past while boldly facing the future.



Pedro Walpole during his presentation at the Asian Forum in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Situation and Struggle: Ancestral Domain in Today's World² | Mercy Pakiwag



Mercy Pakiwag, APC teacher, and other delegates are welcomed warmly by local youth in Kathmandu, Nepal

Laudato Si' is a powerful document for Indigenous Peoples, affirming our identity, spirituality, and role in safeguarding creation. It recognizes our unique bond with the land and encourages us to raise our voices in the care for our ancestral domains. While we can address immediate community concerns, Laudato Si' reminds us that we must work in solidarity to face larger, global challenges, especially concerning the guardianship of forests, oceans, and land.

Gratitude to the Creator, our Tagbaya, flows through our everyday lives. The forests, waters, and land are sacred to us, sustaining our livelihoods, dreams, and cultural heritage. This is our bounden duty: to care for these gifts for our children and their children, ensuring that our way of life continues to flourish.

The message of Laudato Si' strengthens our commitment to this vision, calling us to work not only for ourselves but in partnership and solidarity with others who share this mission.

Laudato Si' is a powerful document for Indigenous Peoples, affirming our identity, spirituality, and role in safeguarding creation. It recognizes our unique bond

with the land and encourages us to raise our voices in the care for our ancestral domains. While we can address immediate community concerns, Laudato Si' reminds us that we must work in solidarity to face larger, global challenges, especially concerning the guardianship of forests, oceans, and land.

Gratitude to the Creator, our Tagbaya, flows through our everyday lives. The forests, waters, and land are sacred to us, sustaining our livelihoods, dreams, and cultural heritage. This is our bounden duty: to care for these gifts for our children and their children, ensuring that our way of life continues to flourish. The message of Laudato Si' strengthens our commitment to this vision, calling us to work not only for ourselves but in partnership and solidarity with others who share this mission.

Our commitment remains steadfast. Despite the massive degradation, we continue to accompany the land, ensuring it heals and grows. We empower our youth to lead, guided by the wisdom of our elders. Water is respected through sustainable management practices and so also, we seek to care for biodiversity. Yet we face challenges from industrial agriculture, which entices us with a cash crop of HYV maize for animal feeds, damaging the land and water in ways that threaten our future.

Our education system must be about ecological citizenship, deeply rooted in culture and responsibility for ancestral land. As Pulangiyen, we see our ancestral domain not just as a place, but as a legacy—one where peace, solidarity, and care for the land, forests, and water allow us to thrive. These values draw us closer to Jesus, who showed us God's love through parables of life and the landscapes of His time.

²Excerpt from the speech delivered by Mercy Pakiwag at the Asian Forum on "Celebrating Synodality & Indigenous Living Traditions in the Asian Church."

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FORUM: <https://www.licas.news/2024/12/09/amplifying-indigenous-voices-asian-forum-on-synodality-issues-call-to-action/>

The Treaty of Waitangi: A Covenant?

Fr. Gerard Burns | RAOEN Steering Committee



Copy of the Treaty of Waitangi displayed at the Te Papa Museum, Aotearoa New Zealand | Photo by RAOEN

On February 6, 1840, the British Crown signed a treaty with Māori chiefs at Waitangi in the north of New Zealand. The British understood that the chiefs ceded their sovereignty and other things to the British Crown. The chiefs, signing the treaty in their own language, did not do that, but rather gave permission to the British Crown to take over some aspects of government in the country. The chiefs believed there would be some equal, collaborative partnership between themselves and the Crown. They were guaranteed full possession of their lands, forests and fisheries (key economic and subsistence elements). This did not happen and after 20 years when Māori stopped selling land to settlers then the Crown sent troops into 'rebellious' areas to achieve military conquest. This finally established full Crown rule over the land. Waitangi Day commemorates the treaty signing in 1849 and is the national day and recognizes the treaty as a constitutional document for the country. Since the 1970s, the treaty has been resuscitated and successive governments have made some reparations to tribes for injustices, land loss, marginalization. At the same time there has been a cultural revival so that Māori language and practices have been increasingly incorporated into general social life. This has not pleased everyone and there are currently attempts to roll this process back. Many have spoken of the Treaty as a covenant between peoples. As such it should not be altered unilaterally.

Getting to know RAOEN's Sub-Regional Coordinator for Southeast Asia



Carmela Marie Santos is a licensed environmental planner and has extensive experience in environmental sustainability, policy advocacy, and community engagement. She has led numerous successful initiatives and policy advocacy efforts in Davao City, Mindanao, Philippines. She has also been instrumental in maintaining the Open-pit Mining Ban in South Cotabato and the adoption of key ecosystems in Davao City.

She also served as a volunteer with the Jesuit Volunteers Philippines (JVP) over 25 years ago in a coastal and upland community struggling with rural poverty. Since then, she has dedicated herself to environmental education, governance, and advocacy work while working

in academia. Her Jesuit education and Christian Life Community (CLC) identity inform her ongoing work with local communities on issues ranging from urban green spaces to anti-mining efforts, and wildlife and marine protection. As a founding member of both the Sustainable Davao Movement and the SuP-free Coalition, she continues to support youth-led initiatives. She is also a co-parent of three children with her husband, an organic agriculture and development management practitioner.

Indigenous Voices Against Power Players: The Namosi Community | Teresa Q. Powell



On December 10th, the people of Navunikabi in Namosi, Fiji, gathered to observe World Human Rights Day. This event was more than just a celebration; it was a powerful assertion of their rights as members of the vanua (land). Their collective voice echoed a resolute message: "We don't want Dams and Mining in Namosi." This gathering symbolized the determination of the Namosi community to protect their land and heritage against external pressures.

Navunikabi is a village in the Namosi Province of Fiji, known for its strong family atmosphere and mountainous farmlands that provide produce to its people. Home to over 200 residents, the village is vulnerable to flooding due to its proximity to the river. To combat this, the community has constructed a retention wall and is seeking long-term solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Additionally, Navunikabi is home to the Namosi Eco Retreat, a modest, villager-run eco-tourism project offering a traditional Fijian experience. Located in a reconstructed Fijian village, the retreat allows guests to participate in activities such as hiking, rafting, and swimming. The retreat also offers free breakfast and parking, and guests can enjoy local food and learn about the culture.

The landowners of Namosi, staunchly opposed to mining developments, have openly criticized the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, Filimoni Vosarogo. They deemed his approach as "unprofessional" and disconnected from the reality of the people he claims to serve. The community feels that the minister prioritizes economic development over their rights, sidelining their voices in favor of corporate interests.

In a statement, the Lomani Au Maroroi Au (LAMA) chairman, Sipiario Nariva, highlighted the minister's failure to connect with the community. He argued that Vosarogo's allegiance to Tui (Chief)

Namosi compromises his ability to represent the landowners' interests. Nariva and LAMA emphasized that the land is not solely the property of the Mataqali Nabukebuke (Clan) but is shared among all landowners, calling for a more inclusive dialogue.

LAMA has urged Vosarogo to engage with all landowners rather than just a select few, insisting that true representation requires listening to the community's collective voice. The organization condemned the minister's lack of presence in Namosi, asserting that genuine understanding comes from listening to the people directly affected by his decisions.

The proposed hydro dam on the Wainikoroiluva River has intensified fears among villagers. They worry that the dam could block the river, leading to devastating floods and the potential relocation of their communities. With even normal rainfall causing rapid water level rises, the threat to their homes and livelihoods is tangible. The villagers are not just fighting for today; they are advocating for a sustainable future for their children.

In the face of these challenges, the community remains united. Advocates like Sipi Nariva continue to push back against injustices and non-compliance. Their enduring struggle is a testament to their resilience and commitment to safeguarding their land and resources.

The story of Namosi is a powerful reminder of the importance of indigenous rights in the face of economic pressures. As the community stands firm against power players, their voices resonate not just in Fiji but throughout the globe, emphasizing the need for respect, understanding, and genuine partnership in the pursuit of development. Together, they embody the spirit of "People Power Our Power" fighting for a future where their rights are honored and protected.

RAOEN Journeys with the Integral Ecology Group of Diocese of Malaybalay

RAOEN led a 2-day workshop with the newly-formed Integral Ecology Group of the Diocese of Malaybalay on January 27-28, 2025 in Balay Laudato Si' in Bendum. The group is led by Fr. Reynaldo Raluto who leads the Jesus Nazareno Parish in Libona.

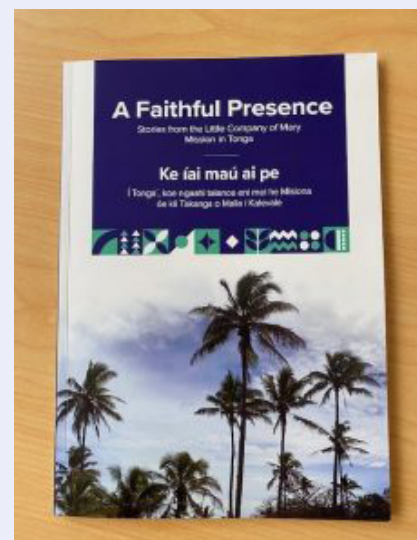
The workshop was not structured, but conversational. Listening was also encouraged to develop the group's team building, defining their purpose, and understanding shared concerns and opportunities. Participants engaged in deep listening and reflection, exploring how to discern God's will within their current roles in the church and society.

The core team members identified themselves as "seeds needing nurturing," "initiators," "catalysts," and "nature lovers," driven by a desire to live by example and witness to their communities. They conceptualized integral ecology using the human person as a symbol: the head representing inner formation, the heart symbolizing faith, the middle reflecting culture, and the feet/legs grounding them in family and basic ecclesial communities, with a pathway through forest and water leading to integral ecology.

In the coming days, RAOEN visits communities and Bishops in order to move RAOEN's mission. The activity served as a point for the team to learn how to listen better and engage with communities through storytelling.



Book Launch of A Faithful Presence, Stories from the LCM Mission in Tonga – Little Company of Mary



The Book Launch of "A Faithful Presence, Stories from the Little Company of Mary Mission in Tonga" written by Mike Fitzsimons, was held as part of the LCM Tonga Golden Jubilee celebration. The book looks at the establishment and ongoing work of the Little Company of Mary in Tonga with stories and photos from the Sisters and many of the wonderful people who have been involved and supported the Tonga mission over the years.

<https://www.lcm.org.au/book-launch-of-a-faithful-presence-stories-from-the-lcm-mission-in-tonga/>



Building Ecclesial Networks and Prophetic Voices for the Kingdom in Asia³ | Pedro Walpole



Pedro Walpole, Mercy Pakiwag, and Maura Lipanda at the Asian Forum on "Celebrating Synodality & Living Traditions in the Asian Church" in Nepal.

Societies and the church interact and prompt responses particularly during difficult times. The church needs to respond both to its institutional concerns and the wellbeing of the local communities where the Holy Spirit continues to act throughout the whole church where there are efforts to listen. One of the areas where the Holy Spirit is continuously found is at the personal and community level of interaction, of people pleading and listening and hoping in the Lord. Simple rejoicing in the birth of a child, the wonder of the Creator, the harvest taken in, the needs of neighbours and the possibility to be kind without judgement. Here the engagement to pray together as a small community calls for availability and communality of all to act in faith beyond the Sunday Eucharist and gather to humbly listen and offer care and prayer together.

This helps at times to live a less distracted life given the sense of commitment to come together at set times, humbly working with what the "we" in community care to share. It is difficult not to judge neighbours met daily. For the youth forming their own reflection group this can be a creative and respectful challenge. Hopeful as they expand into the world the youth who learn to speak of their faith bring the word of God as a shared experience amidst all the other unknowns.

Building such ecclesial communities and connecting these into a broader faith experience of the local church sustains the commitment to express humbly the living Gospel. Today, in the world we find the external challenges, which are so interwoven as ecological concerns and the daily life of the poor, an important trellis for growing the network of faith communities to bear fruit.

RAOEN is a broad ecclesial network covering the largest biome of the Pacific Ocean and peoples and the islands and landmass of Asia with so many struggling people seeking a sustainable humble life in the Creator. Can life with the land and seas inspire a deeper faith of compassion and hope that seeks an integral ecology and economy that cares for the poor and raises voices of humble leadership?

³Excerpt from the paper presented by Pedro Walpole at the Asian Forum on "Celebrating Synodality & Indigenous Living Traditions in the Asian Church."

Social and Pastoral Works of Local Community⁴

Maura Lipanda

We are called to explore the integration of indigenous spirituality and pastoral care within local community life, illustrating practical approaches to synodality and Laudato Si' principles. Drawing from her experience as a leader in Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), Lipanda describes how these gatherings serve as vibrant spaces where traditional practices and Christian faith intertwine, enabling a deep reflection of spiritual life coming from the created world. She highlights the cultural approaches used in catechism, where indigenous practices from the land are thoughtfully incorporated into Christian education.

This method, Maura explains, helps affirm children's indigenous identity within their faith journey, leading to a more integrated understanding of their spirituality and heritage. These projects not only address practical needs but also reinforce the community's spiritual growth on the land.

⁴Excerpt from the speech delivered by Maura Lipanda at the Asian Forum on "Celebrating Synodality & Indigenous Living Traditions in the Asian Church."



The challenges faced by indigenous communities are acknowledged, including environmental degradation and cultural erosion. There is a need to emphasize how faith, community solidarity, and environmental guardianship play crucial roles in addressing these concerns. There are specific ways the Church can walk alongside Indigenous Peoples in the synodal journey, suggesting how indigenous wisdom can contribute to addressing both community and environmental needs.

The presentation touches upon the belief in Mother Earth, drawing upon our devotion to Mother Mary, as a provider and the responsibility to care for her, linking this to the community's motivation

for collaborative problem-solving. There is an invitation to reflect on creating spaces where Indigenous wisdom and Christian faith can work together to address pressing community and environmental concerns, aligning with the Church's synodal vision. This approach not only nurtures spiritual growth but also promotes sustainable solutions rooted in both faith and traditional knowledge, towards a more inclusive and environmentally conscious Church.

Synodality in Action

Fr. Frank Hoare



Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in Nabala is a rural parish on Vanua Levu, the second main island in Fiji. It has Catholics in about eleven villages numbering about 1,300 people. Fr Iowane Manasa is the parish priest. It is a poor parish, so it is a struggle for the people to meet their fundraising target for the parish each year.

This year, Fr Manasa and Nabala parish leaders decided that, instead of prolonged fundraising over months culminating in a one-day bazaar, the men of the parish would cut the cane of seven Muslim cane farmers who lived close together near Seaqaqa, not far from the parish centre. It was agreed that the parishioners would cut about 3,200 tons of cane at \$25 a ton. They would give the \$80,000 thus raised to the parish as their fundraising for 2024. The Muslim farmers also contributed some money for food and provided simple accommodation.



As a result, over 100 male parishioners are camping in temporary sheds in the farmers' compounds and cut cane together every day, chatting and joking as they work. About 12 female parishioners cook for them. The men rise and pray at 5.00 am, drink a cup of tea at 6.00 am, and walk to the areas of work. They return to their main base for breakfast at 9.00 am and continue cutting cane until lunch. After a short rest, they resume work until 5.00 pm. Before showering, they enjoy tea and bread.



All assemble for Mass in the main shed each evening, singing with gusto and listening respectfully to the scripture readings and homily. They then have their evening meal and sleep on the ground in their sheds until morning. On weekends, they drink the traditional drink, kava. Sunday is, of course, a day of rest.

These men have left their homes and plantations for six weeks, live in basic conditions and will give the fruits of their labour to their parish. They also pray together and celebrate the Eucharist daily. They are strengthening their bonds with parishioners from other villages. It is like a prolonged retreat or a liminal period. The Muslim family is very impressed by their witness and their behaviour. One Muslim farmer told me that among them there is no questioning or bickering and that they show great respect to their priest. The Muslims understand the Fijian language and the men often sit among the workers during the Eucharist. In fact, one of them wanted to receive the "bread" distributed at communion until the meaning of the Eucharist was explained to him.

A group of parishioners from the neighbouring Columban parish of Labasa visited the Nabala cane cutters with a large gift of food on July 2nd. It was ritually presented and accepted. In accepting the food, the spokesman for the cane cutters said that their combined effort for their parish is synodality in action - community participation in the mission of the Church.

Synodality for them is not a difficult or strange word. Rather, it is based on one of the key cultural values of Fijians: solesolevaki (collaborating in solidarity on behalf of the community). It combines physical, social, and spiritual aspects. It is awe-inspiring.

This article and accompanying images are also published on the [Fiji Columbans Facebook page](#).



FEBRUARY

- 4** RAOEN Advisory Council Meeting
- 11** Meeting with Visit to Bishop Alarcon (Bishop on Youth)
- 13-14** Ecclesial Visit to Bishop Rapadas of the Diocese of Iligan
- 15-16** Ecclesial Visit to Bishop Bagaforo of the Diocese of Kidapawan
- 22** Community Visit with the Youth of Cabanglasan, Malaybalay

MARCH

- 1-3** ROOTS Training of Trainers in Bendum, Malaybalay City
- 12-15** [Loyola University Chicago Climate Change Conference](#)
Theme: *Shifting Waters: Water Security and the Emerging Water Crisis*
To register for the Conference, click [here](#)
- 20** Steering Committee Meeting

APRIL

- 6-12; 20-26** Community Visit in Thailand
- 27** Youth Tapuk in Bendum, Malaybalay City

CONTACT US

River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN)

c/o Environmental Science for Social Change
1/F Manila Observatory Building
Ateneo de Manila University Campus
Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108
Philippines

Tel: +63 2 8927 9684

Email: raoen.network@gmail.com

For peoples, oceans and forests

*Share your reflection – visit www.raoen.org
Use the RAOEN Toolkit on the website
so you can add your voice.*

A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. (LS 202)

FOLLOW & SUBSCRIBE

