

In all things to love and to serve



Irish Jesuit Missions

Newsletter

ISSUE 29 | SPRING 2020

MAJIS: a Flagship of Self-Reliance in South Sudan

Social Networks in South Sudan

Though barely 10 years old as an independent nation after seceding from Sudan in 2011, peace has remained an illusion in South Sudan. The tough stance and reluctance of the political elites to work together for the sake of building the young nation continues to render South Sudan volatile, unstable, and insecure. Meanwhile, thousands of people continue to lose their lives and millions are displaced. Due to economic challenges bedeviling the young nation, most of the people survive on support from humanitarian agencies and church institutions.

This precarious situation and the long history of war and conflict inspired the Society of Jesus in Eastern Africa in 2010 to open a new project to empower South Sudanese people to be self-reliant. The Multi-Educational and Agricultural Jesuit Institute of South Sudan (MAJIS), which runs short courses on sustainable agriculture with a special focus on vegetable



A Woman works at the Multi Agricultural Jesuit Institute of South Sudan (MAJIS)

production, beekeeping, poultry production, animal husbandry and agro-forestry, is one such project.

Hundreds of people, the majority of them women, have graduated from the courses, but face the challenge of inadequate water and safe plots of land to apply the agricultural knowledge and skills they have learned. MAJIS offers some of the graduates or participants of the courses plots

of land within the boundaries of our farm, where they can access to water, as well as closer supervision and accompaniment from the programme officers. Other graduates or participants from neighbouring villages have been organised in groups of 35, which form outreach programmes. Each one operates within a piece of land that is donated and owned by the local community. MAJIS supports each group by drilling a borehole

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MAJIS: a flagship of self-reliance in South Sudan

for each of them to provide water, as well as seeds, expertise and tools.

In 2019, 148 people graduated from the MAJIS short courses; 108 were women, and 67 of these widows. These graduates are now managing their own plots where they are producing vegetables as well as keeping chicken, bees and farm animals. For many women in the programme, MAJIS has lifted their living standard by offering them an alternative to dependence on food aid. As people dependent on pastoralism, in an era of cattle-rustling and climate change, having a reliable income-generating activity cushions them from starvation. For many widows in the group, who do not have a husband to provide for them, the programme helps them to support their children. Income from the produce helps these people to afford basic necessities such as food, medication, clothing

and school fees for their school-going children.

Ayieda Turdit Magok, one of the women who graduated from a vegetable production course and now manages her own plot says *"MAJIS programme has benefitted me a lot. I make 3,000 South Sudanese pounds a week (equivalent to 11 US Dollars). With this money, I'm able to send my children to school, buy them food and cloths, and treat them when they fall sick. In November last year, I managed to buy one goat, this is a great saving for me as I can sell it in case I encounter a great need in the future. I feel this programme has changed my life and the life of my children."*

Social Support Systems

Interacting during the trainings and working together as groups, either while digging or watering crops, helps women in the groups to build social support systems.

I occasionally find them sitting together after work or around the hand-pump when fetching water, to share their joys and hopes, and the griefs and anxieties of living in South Sudan. When I listen to their sharing, I often appreciate how these groups help them to make friends among themselves that can bolster them emotionally especially when they are feeling down or overwhelmed by stress or loss. Other practical benefits of this dimension of MAJIS programmes include creating forums for comforting and enhancing feelings of security and family.

This supportive relationship also enhances opportunities and social networks through which MAJIS has been able to help the local community and government to think through alternatives on how to solve problems affecting the people in Rumbek. +

Author: Augustine Edan Ekeno SJ, Director of MAJIS

A Word from the Director

"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister and Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us and who produces various fruit with coloured flower and herbs". This prayer from Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures* is full of Easter joy. Pope Francis uses it at the beginning of his *Laudato Si'*, his encyclical letter about the environment.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, which urges us to care for the earth, Our Common Home. In that time, our awareness of environmental issues and the damage caused by climate breakdown has increased, but our leaders are still not taking sufficient action. The saddest outcome of this apathy is that it is the most vulnerable people in our world who are suffering most. They are also the ones who have contributed least to the carbon emissions that are causing the destruction of our planet.

In the midst of all this we have

reason for hope because of the effort of so many Jesuits and lay partners. They are inspired by the message of *Laudato Si'* and are working with local communities to mitigate the effects of climate breakdown and the articles in this issue of the newsletter reflect this. In Malawi, the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) is running a three-year project that works with smallholder farmers, many of them women in implementing natural, 'climate-smart' methods of agriculture to survive and thrive as weather patterns change affect the crops.

Martha Phiri, who works in JCED promoting sustainable energy, tells us about how the ecologically friendly cooking stoves the centre is distributing to local villages are helping to save trees and prevent respiratory diseases in mothers and children. Limerick Jesuit, Pedro Walpole SJ is an advocate for ecological balance in Asia Pacific and his article reflects on ecology in the Pulangi Valley of the Philippines. As South Sudan moves cautiously to implement a peace agreement, Augustine Edan Ekeno SJ's piece tells us how the MAJIS project



in Rumbek, South Sudan helps the people, especially women, to become self-reliant. Martina Madden of our communications team writes about her visit to Malawi late last year where she saw first-hand the work the JCED is doing in local villages to help communities and the natural environment.

Easter is indeed a time of hope, which we spread through our concern and support of one another. Let us continue to spread the good news of hope through our actions and make our world a better place for each and all. Happy Easter. +

Fr John K. Guiney SJ | Director

Ecology and Development in Malawi

Our communications officer, Martina Madden visited the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development in Malawi in December to find out how it promotes environmental integrity while ensuring that local communities have a livelihood they can depend on.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, where more than half of the population live below the poverty line, and a quarter live in extreme poverty. Its economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, which employs nearly 80% of the population. These smallholder farmers are particularly vulnerable to the erratic weather patterns caused by climate change. If the rains come too early or too late, crops cannot be planted or do not survive long enough to be harvested. This affects the farmers' yields and the availability of food.

"We want our dreams to be so big they scare us", says Adrian Makasa Chikwamo SJ, a Zambian Jesuit who is Director of the Jesuit Centre of Ecology and Development (JCED) in Malawi. He is talking about the challenge this small centre faces tackling both poverty in Malawi and the effects of climate breakdown, and his optimism and enthusiasm is shared by the whole team. JCED's head office is in Lilongwe but the real action takes place about two hours' drive away, in the Kasungu region, where the field work happens. The centre's five field officers are based here, working with 30 groups from local villages on protecting the natural environment and adapting to the impact of climate change. Each field officer is a social community development worker who specialises in a different aspect of the project.

Farmers' field schools

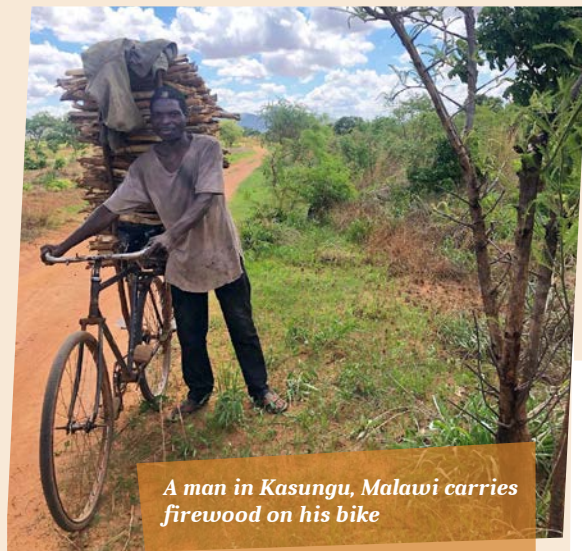
The team holds meetings regularly with the Farmers' Field School groups, which are made up of 15-25 men and women. I attended one of these mobilisation and planning meetings with the JCED team, in a village outside Kasungu. It was

a typical December day in Malawi, the temperature was over 30 degrees and I was grateful that the meeting took place under a straw-covered canopy that gave some protection from the sun. It was interesting for me to observe how the JCED team and the members of the farmers group interacted. The team has a high level of expertise and each member holds academic qualifications, in natural resources management, agroforestry or a related subject, but they talk and listen to the farmers as equals, addressing their concerns and valuing the intimate knowledge of the land and years of farming experience that the group has. The genuine mutual respect is palpable, and the mood of the meeting is jovial despite the serious issues under discussion.

The JCED Team

Tione Matthews Phwandaphwanda leads the team in its mission of teaching 'climate-smart agriculture'; natural methods of planting, mulching and making organic manure that keep nutrients in the soil and help it to retain water. Irrigation is a real challenge for farmers in this sub-tropical climate, and there are many requests for more boreholes in the villages.

Rapid population growth in Malawi (from 3.8 million people in 1960 to almost 19 million today) has led to an increased need for agricultural land and added to the pressure on its forests. Poverty and a lack of alternative income-generating opportunities mean many people in rural Malawi have little choice but to harvest forest resources for food,



A man in Kasungu, Malawi carries firewood on his bike

firewood, medicine and building materials.

Team member Nameka Katumbi oversees the centre's reforestation programme. Trees provide shade from the sun and shed leaves, which helps to keep moisture in the ground. The practice of ploughing a field to rid it of shrubs and trees before creating drills to plant in is discouraged for the benefit these natural plants provide to the soil. As part of its reforestation programme, JCED grows tree seedlings in a nursery in Lilongwe and on a farm in Kasungu to distribute to the groups who are encouraged to plant them around their homesteads to provide shade and bear fruit which can be eaten.

The consequence of Malawi's dependence on wood is the loss of 3% its forests every year which, if it continues, will leave the country without trees by 2079. This lack of forests and the overuse of agricultural land has stripped the soil of its nutrients and made the country especially vulnerable to the extreme weather events that happen with increasing frequency

now, such as 2018's floods. JCED's Martha Phiri promotes use of the ceramic cooking stoves among the farmer groups, which dramatically reduce the amount of firewood needed to use them (*see Martha's article in this newsletter*).

In order to become resilient to the impact of a changing climate on agriculture, the groups are helped to develop alternative sources of income, to allow them to buy food and essentials when needed. JCED's Martin Chikumba works with the farmers on savings and loan schemes set up within each

group that function like credit unions by offering small loans to members. I saw the scheme at work in a local village, where we arrived on the day where the dividends were shared among the group. It was humbling to witness the happiness on the face of a woman who had received the equivalent of seven Euro, who planned to go to town to buy rice for her family.

Climate Action

Many of the sights in Malawi caused me to reflect on the excess

and waste that characterises our way of living in Ireland and witnessing how climate change is impacting on people's lives there brought home the reality of it.

What the JCED team is doing is important. They may dream big, but their knowledge and hard work match up to their dreams. It's time for us to play our part too, by campaigning for our government to be serious about taking action on climate change, which is affecting vulnerable people who did not cause it. +

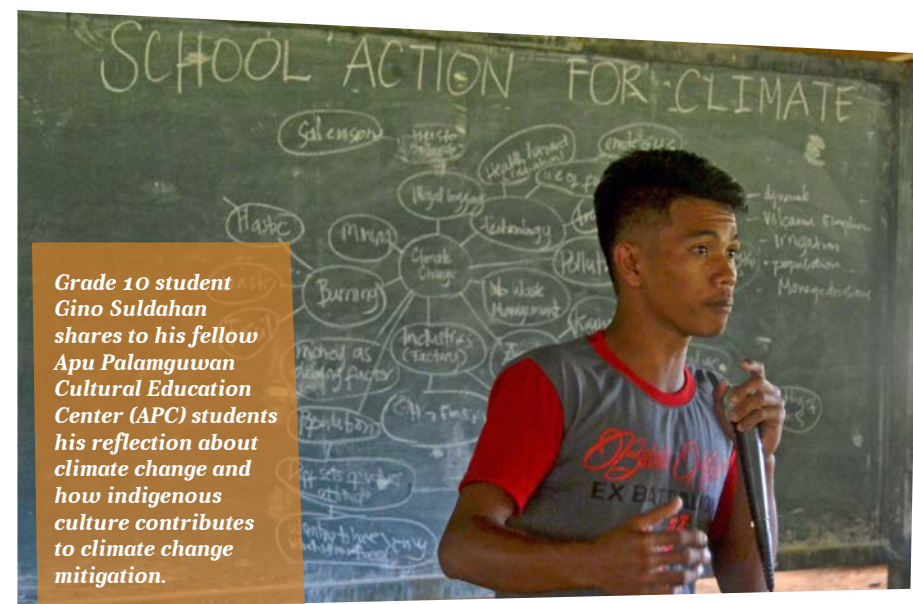
Ecology and Care: Ways Forward

Pedro Walpole SJ

Last week, I was with a community forest team that visited the farthest villages to the north in the Pulangi Valley in Mindanao, Philippines. We spent the days in constant rain, riding motorbikes, bamboo rafts, and wading through rivers often waist-deep to get to the communities. We listened to people talk about safe water, organic farming, or getting their kids to school in places called Ananasu and other villages that are only found on the maps we produce.

The chemical agricultural business has arrived in full force, promising the world; conditions are but a whisper. The promise of a fortune wins many followers and for most it turns to debt with the traders, while the soils are leached of nutrients and erode. Upland small farmers are today the poorest professionals on earth. The world is into pre-packaged, reconstituted, preserved easy foods at hunger farmgate pricing.

Grade 10 student Gino Suldahan shares to his fellow Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) students his reflection about climate change and how indigenous culture contributes to climate change mitigation.



But life's not all like that; many care and are changing how things move. Many answers we reap today cause us to ask new questions, to hope and act for a better future. Every generation must face new questions and it is good that there are others who accompany.

Some of the farmers give priority to their own food security. They seek to secure community water quality by protecting spring sources and regenerating natural forest. Previously they supported their children to get jobs outside in poultry farms and gas stations, but now some have come home sick. A few youth, who having experienced these changes,

have other ideas and are asking where they belong. What can they relearn from their own people, not just from popular media? Three of the youth team I travelled with told their own stories and questioned why the old relations of community are not taught. A second chance to weigh things up is becoming increasingly important for the youth after initial work experience; creating space for such exchange is critical.

As a Jesuit, I support the *Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center* which runs training programmes for youth including bamboo processing, organic food and rebuilding ecological services in the face of climate

change. It is important for youth to ask questions, communicate, (i.e. trust others) and to weigh up commitment before deciding on action.

I also work on the research end of *Environmental Science for Social Change* and *Ecojesuit* and advocate for “glocal,” the local-to-global. As we work locally, stories go out and coalesce from many areas at the global level, strengthening the advocacy or the agenda for change. Precisely because of rapid change, local realities get to the centre where others are building platforms and networks, a wirearchy supporting local voices.

Collaboration today goes way beyond Jesuit networks with people who share in the mission

of a healing world bearing good news. The Universal Apostolic Preferences give us the basis to share meaningfully and discern in a secular world where interfaith action is recognised and valued. Ecojesuit this year continues to give focus to efforts in climate strike/ action and meetings of the annual Conference of the Parties (COP of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) to form guidelines for the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, as engaged by communities of hope.

Pope Francis’ post-Amazon Synod message, *Querida Amazonia*, must have a thousand quotes bringing joy to the world.

“In order to prevent this process of human impoverishment, there is a

need to care lovingly for our roots, since they are ‘a fixed point from which we can grow and meet new challenges.’ I urge the young people of the Amazon region, especially the indigenous peoples, to ‘take charge of your roots, because from the roots comes the strength that will make you grow, flourish and bear fruit.’”

Every community we visited in the Pulangi Valley cooked what food they had to welcome us. I continue to learn from the rich-at-heart with great hope, great mercy and peace. Human nature has a good side which, though not always prevailing, is unquenchable. Commitment to change is not simply a question of success but of accompaniment, endurance, and of shared hope. +

Author: Pedro Walpole SJ is Director of Research at the Institute of Environmental Science for Social Change in the Philippines and Coordinator of Reconciliation with Creation for the Jesuit Conference Asia Pacific.

Cooking Stoves Protect the Natural Environment

The Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) in Malawi is distributing locally made fuel-efficient ceramic cooking stoves, known as ‘chitetezo mbaula’, among poor households in the Kasungu District of Malawi.

Traditionally, these households use a three-stone fireplace for cooking and heating water, but due to uncontrolled air circulation, firewood burns quickly, and huge quantities of smoke are emitted causing breathing problems to women and girls who cook the food for the family.

Martha Phiri, a Field Officer for Energy at the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development responsible for the promotion of the fuel-efficient ceramic cooking stoves says *“The demand for ceramic cook stoves is overwhelming. Last year we distributed them to nearly 1300 households, and we plan to reach out to an additional 2500*

Energy efficient stoves in use in a village in Malawi



Cooking Stoves Protect the Natural Environment

households this year. This will just be a portion of the existing demand in this area".

A ceramic cook stove uses less than 40% of the wood that is normally used by a three-stone fire to cook the same amount of food, and releases less far smoke as the wood burns. The stove also retains some heat after the wood burns out. Because of this, the stoves are wanted by all households in the area.

They are locally made by groups whom the JCED works with, who receive technical know-how on their production. The stoves are then purchased from the group and distributed to households in villages the JCED works in. The centre is currently training a new group in

how to make the stoves, which will provide them with an income and increase the number of stoves that are made and distributed in the region.

Queen Mwale is one of the people who received an energy-efficient cooking stove from the JCED in Kasungu, Malawi.

"Since I started using chitetezo mbaula (cooking stove) for cooking and heating, my family no longer suffers from respiratory diseases due to the inhalation of excess fumes from a three-stone fireplace. The same quantity of firewood I could use for two days, I now use it for a week. I have more time to care for my family and take part in economic activities and my children have more time to do their school work.

Thank you to the Jesuits for giving life to my family".

Adrian Makasa Chikwamo, SJ, the Director of the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development, reports: *"We are translating the Jesuits' Universal Apostolic Principles into real life experiences for the communities we work with by providing them with an efficient energy source for household cooking, which preserves trees and forests and protects the natural environment".*

The Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development is grateful to its partners on this mission, especially the Irish Jesuit Missions in Dublin. ☺

Author: Martha Phiri is Field Officer for Energy at JCED, Malawi.

MALAWI CLEAN ENERGY STOVES Lenten Appeal

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, and it is in the middle of an environmental crisis. It is losing its forests at a rate of 3% a year, which if it continues would leave it without any trees by 2079. The Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) is working to protect the natural environment in Malawi while also ensuring that rural communities have a sustainable livelihood.

Energy-efficient ceramic cooking stoves are produced by local groups of people, and provide them with a source of income. The stoves' simple efficient design means they use far less wood than traditional methods of cooking, which dramatically reduces the amount of trees that are cut down for firewood. They also emit less toxic smoke, which protects the people using them from respiratory problems.

Giving the gift of a stove will help to save Malawi's forests and its people's health.



To learn more about our missions or to make a donation, please contact:
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For more information on the issues in this newsletter, visit www.jesuitmissions.ie



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