



## No Mother Should Need to Choose Between Food and Clothing

For most people in war-torn Syria, the biggest danger is no longer bombs and bullets, it is poverty. The gap between income and the cost of basic necessities is so large that it is life-threatening.

The people of Syria are living through a crisis of unimaginable proportions. Most people in the world know of the political and security crisis and the all-out war that has ravaged the country and its people since 2011. What is less known about is the silent war that continues to ravage the country in the aftermath.

### Fuel and Electricity Crisis

Many people will die in Syria this winter, and near-freezing temperatures and harsh weather conditions will add to the suffering and trauma of millions more. The electricity network was destroyed

in the war, leaving many homes without electricity and those who are fortunate enough to be connected to the main grid have as little as two hours supply per day. Fuel for central heating or generators is both unaffordable and unavailable. Bottled gas is rationed – a household could get just one drum to last them for three months.

### Cost of Basic Necessities Beyond Reach

Hyperinflation and the weakening of the currency is causing enormous suffering. Most people are employed

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by the Government where the average salary is 60,000 Syrian Pounds (around €20) a month. Those who work in the private sector are a little better off - the minimum salary is around 120,000 SYP - still less than €50 a month. Many Syrians have no work and therefore no regular income. For about 90 percent of the population, whatever their income, the cost of the basic necessities for living – food, clothing, fuel – far outweighs it. Many people survive only because of daily bread subsidised by the Government, which does not provide sufficient nourishment and still leaves people hungry.

## Choosing Between Affording Food or Clothing

Sammar is a mother of two children who attend the Jesuit Refugee Service education programme in Damascus. Her husband and her mother were killed in a rocket attack during the war. She now lives in a partially constructed block of apartments with no running water and no electricity. Families like Sammar's – who are living in poorly insulated settings with no heating system – the drop in temperatures in the coming four months will add enormously to the challenge for survival.

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*Even if I could afford some meat or eggs the next challenge will be to afford cooking oil or gas to cook.*

She explains her dilemma “A tray of thirty eggs currently costs about 12,000 Syrian Pounds, that is about 15 percent of my income for the month, a kilo of meat would take half my monthly income. Even if I could afford some meat or eggs the next challenge will be to afford cooking oil or gas to cook.” There is no possibility that Sammar could afford the equivalent of €15 for a good winter jacket or €3 for thermal underwear for her children. A mother choosing whether to spend her limited income on feeding or clothing her two children is a decision that nobody should have to make.

## JRS Winter Clothing Appeal

This winter, the Jesuit Refugee Service in Syria will distribute winter clothes to Sammar's children and more than 2,000 others like them who are attending JRS education programmes. Children who receive a clothing winter kit from JRS will need to wear these clothes as much to cope with the cold indoors at home as they will outside.

“I will still face many challenges, but the support of JRS gives me strength to keep my children in school and not have them go out to work. Thank God for JRS because of them I have some hope.” says Sammar.



## A Word from the Director

We come to the end of 2021 with a sense of relief and gratitude that we are alive after all the Covid restrictions and trauma that has touched so many lives.

We begin a new year of 2022 with renewed hope that vaccines do work and can be distributed in a more equitable way in our world. We also hear alarming forecasts about our planet and global warming and yet the meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) held in Glasgow in November 2021 is a source of hope that leaders of nations who pollute the world the most can change their policies for a safer and healthier world.

This issue of our newsletter focuses on the effects of climate change on people most vulnerable to it, who are the ones that have done least to cause it. It is significant to note in our newsletter that women - who are the primary carers and food producers in the Global South - are the most active in mitigating the effects of global warming. We hear from the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, where Martina Madden from

our communications team attended events that gave voice to individuals and communities who have lost land and livelihoods because of the crisis. We also hear from Tim Flynn [our Roving Monitor & Evaluations Advisor] who visits an agricultural project in Malawi which supports smallholder farmers to adapt to the changing weather patterns which are affecting their harvests.

Another agricultural programme in South Sudan has trained hundreds of women who were forced from their lands by a conflict which has been exacerbated by climate change to grow crops and become self-sufficient. We hear from a long-term donor of ours who was inspired by the story of a woman there to support the programme for years.

As extreme weather events become more usual, we also think of Syrian

families who are facing a harsh winter in housing with no heating and ask for your support for children who need warm clothes.

As we celebrate this Christmas and contemplate the vulnerability of the baby Jesus in the crib we bring our own fragility to Him who is the source of life. We also look on his mother Mary who, like so many mothers in our world today, lived with the anxiety of protecting and rearing her child in a harsh and precarious world.

I wish you a blessed, peaceful and healthy Christmas and New Year. Thank you for joining with us in making our world a better place.

Fr John K. Guiney SJ, Director

# ‘Mary Has Become Very Dear To Me’

A long term donor of IJI has shared with us how the contrast between her life and the life of a woman in South Sudan has inspired her to donate to support women like her to thrive.

“Some years ago when I visited the Irish Jesuits International (then Irish Jesuit Missions) office in Gardiner Street to drop in my Christmas subscription, I spotted collection boxes with Mary Apet’s picture. Mary was being trained in sustainable agriculture by MAJIS in South Sudan. I took one of the boxes thinking this was a very handy way to save for such projects, and it had pride of place on a small table in my dining room. I undertook to save every €1 coin I received. Several years, and several boxes later, Mary has become very dear to me. I look at her picture and sometimes contrast our different lifestyles - her life is extremely difficult living in a constant war situation in South Sudan, while I am very lucky to live in relative peace in Ireland. I pray for Mary. I also realise how privileged I am that God is using me as just one of the instruments to help her and her family. I will probably never meet Mary in this life, but hopefully if I make it into the next life - what a joyful meeting we will have. She is on my ‘to meet’ list - along with St. Ignatius, to thank both of them for their attempts to keep me grounded.”

## Mary Apet’s Life

Mary Apet has indeed had a life that is very different to the life of an Irish woman. She and her family have depended heavily on farming to feed themselves ever since she can remember. While her father was away from home moving his cattle across the countryside looking for water and grass, her mother looked after the family, farming on a very small piece of land near their home. The food produced was not even enough for daily life. No surplus. Just survival.

The shortage of food at home forced her at eight years of age to live at the

cattle camp with her father living on cows’ milk; often the only food for the day. There was no opportunity to go to school. When she was just a teenager, she was married to one of the cattle keepers who paid her dowry in cows to her father.

## War Forces Internal Displacement

Before the outbreak of war in South Sudan more than 90 percent of the country’s 10 million people earned their living from agricultural produce on small family farms and from herding cattle. But violence forced families like Mary’s to abandon their land and flee to seek safety and shelter. She belongs to the Amonom clan and had to escape fighting between the Amonom and Panyon people. Now she lives with four of her five children in Akol Jal, near the Jesuit Multi-Educational and Agricultural Jesuit Institute of South Sudan (MAJIS), in Rumbek. It is comparatively peaceful there and she cultivates the land with others, growing vegetables and fruit



## Multi-Educational and Agricultural Jesuit Institute in South Sudan (MAJIS)

At MAJIS Jesuit Farm in Akol Jal people like Mary from the local population take courses to learn about sustainable agriculture with a special focus on vegetable production, beekeeping, poultry production, animal husbandry and agroforestry.

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 plots of land within the boundaries of the farm, where they have access to water, as well as the guidance and support of the programme officers.

The women can bring their children with them to the farm to play, and when they are old enough they can attend an informal school with the children of other women farmers.

MAJIS has been a lifeline for women like Mary, who have been driven from their homes by war and left without any source of income. Thanks to the support of Misesan Cara and personal donors like the author of the quote above, women like Mary have learned the skills they needed to look after their families and live a life of dignity.

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*Mary Apet harvests tomatoes at MAJIS farm in Akol Jal, South Sudan.*



# JCED Combats Climate Change Effects in Malawi

Since Covid-19 restrictions came into place in early 2020, the nature of my role has fundamentally changed. Instead of site visits to different countries to see and report on projects supported by the IJI, my monitoring visits have been online and done over Zoom. As restrictions began to ease throughout countries in Africa in September I was finally able to travel, from my base in Kenya to visit the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) in Malawi.

JCED was founded in 2010 to work towards resolving the environmental degradation of Malawi and to improve productivity and incomes for small-holder farmers who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. These days it also provides support to small holder farmers as they transition to climate smart agriculture and advocates for environmentally sustainable approaches to development.

The centre runs programmes in Lilongwe, Malawi's capital and Kasungu district about two hours north of here, so I spent time in both locations. It was a privilege to see the work that the project team, under the direction of Br Edward Ngonizashé SJ, do with the local communities in the areas of Climate Smart Agriculture, Secure Livelihoods, Forestry, Energy and Green Schools. With funding from Misesan Cara, IJI have been supporting the activities of the Tasinthu project at JCED for the past three years. In 2020 Misesan Cara recognised the work of JCED as one of the winners of their Inaugural Climate Action Awards.

## Women and Agriculture

Agriculture plays an important role in the economic development of Malawi, and women play a key role in it, doing more than 70% of agricultural labour.

JCED works with almost 700 farmers the majority of whom are women. The effects of climate change have meant that these women have lived through floods, dry spells and droughts, pest and disease outbreaks, which resulted in the failure of crops and the loss of income, resulting in sustained hunger and extreme poverty. JCED works with the women to pilot innovative ways of coping with these adverse effects and building resilience to weather changes within the community.

In Malawi, deforestation is very plain to see. Trees play an important role in providing for basic human needs (firewood, food, fodder, fiber, pharmaceuticals, poles and timber), but this reliance on trees means that the country is being stripped of its forests at an alarming rate. JCED is addressing the problem of deforestation by encouraging natural regeneration - allowing native trees and shrubs to grow on farms, and giving farmers with fast growing multipurpose trees that have the ability to improve soil fertility, and fruit trees to help with providing nutrition and another source of income. This intervention has seen over 50,000 seedlings planted by the farmers over

the past three years resulting in the transformation of the landscapes in Kasungu. JCED also promotes the production and use of eco-friendly ceramic stoves. When visiting the group (mainly women) who produce these stoves they spoke of their benefits - they use less firewood, keep in residual heat and produce less indoor smoke which results in fewer respiratory illnesses in their families. This group and others have also benefited from JCED's promotion of small-scale businesses, and the provision of soft loans and village saving schemes. These combined interventions improve household income and strengthen resilience to all kinds of shocks and crisis.

## JCED at COP26

JCED not only works at the grassroots but also networks at national, regional and international levels. Their current programming responds to the Laudato Si' Papal Call to Action on Environmental Sustainability. Br Ngoni was a delegate at the UN COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, giving voice to people like the small-holder farmers JCED works with as they are among the people most affected by the effects of climate change, despite being the ones who did least to cause it.

**Author:** Tim Flynn is IJI Roving Monitoring and Evaluations Advisor



*Tim Flynn receives a gift of a papaya from Clan chief and his wife.*



## COP26 – Voices of the Voiceless

The recent COP26 climate summit in Glasgow was criticised for the relative lack of representatives from the countries which are most affected by climate change, yet have done the least to cause it. People from the Global South were unable to travel in many cases because of the inequity of Covid-19 vaccine distribution globally, or because the cost of making the long journey to Glasgow was prohibitive.

I travelled to Glasgow for a few days with my colleague Ciara Murphy [Climate Policy Advocate at the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice], to see what was happening on the ground and to listen to the voices of those who are least heard.

### Girls' Education and Climate Justice

On my second day in Glasgow, I attended an event called 'The Power of Knowledge: Girls' Education as an Accelerator of Climate Action'. Irish Jesuits International supports a number of education programmes – many of them focused on the education of girls – in countries ranging from Afghanistan to South

Sudan, therefore this session is of particular relevance to me. There are two speakers at the event that I am particularly interested in - Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest Nobel Prize laureate, (known just as Malala) and Vanessa Nakate, a climate activist from Uganda, who is less well-known but has been in the news recently.

The women talked about the interconnection between gender inequality and climate change in their countries and others like them "There is always the prioritising of the boys over the girls" said Nakate, who talked about the patriarchal culture in Uganda where girls miss out on schooling to be given as child brides

in return for money or cattle; or are taken out of school to help the family at home. Uganda is heavily dependent on agriculture and has one of the fastest changing climates in the world, making it particularly vulnerable to climate change. Women are responsible for preparing food, gathering firewood and getting water which means they are at the frontlines when disasters like floods and droughts occur, making the existing gender inequality even worse. Malala said that more than four million girls worldwide are out of school because of climate-related disasters, therefore they are "interlinked and should be addressed together". She gave examples of indigenous girls that her charity The Malala Fund works with in Brazil who are fighting for the right to go

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to school, and simultaneously fighting deforestation and campaigning for land rights in their region.

When asked if they believe the promises of world leaders like Justin Trudeau to ‘do better’ on climate action, the young women laughed at the suggestion. Vanessa Nakate’s answer was particularly powerful. She said “When leaders call us amazing they are handing over responsibility to us”, and added “I hand the responsibility right back to them”. She stated that as an activist she can organise a protest, but as she is not in the negotiating rooms, the power and therefore the responsibility for change does not lie with her or other activists.

The women agreed that the route to effecting real change was through education. Girls need to be educated so they can go on to be the ones who have seats at the tables of power, representing their countries and other women. This is in keeping with what we in Irish Jesuits International believe – that empowering girls through education is better for society and the world. Climate change and its effects on subsistence farmers in countries in Africa, as well as its role in exacerbating conflict worldwide makes it vital that

people in the countries most affected are equipped with the knowledge and resources to find solutions and campaign for action.

### **Indigenous Peoples and Faith at the Climate Frontiers**

The highlight of COP26 for those who were there not to participate but to protest was Saturday’s march which was organised by the COP26 Coalition and attended by tens of thousands of people. What was distinctive about it as well as its size was foregrounding of indigenous peoples from Central and South America, protesting against the destruction of the Amazon and their land. Representatives of this group spoke about the injustice of what they are enduring because of a climate crisis caused by wealthy countries.

The issue of the destruction of the land of indigenous peoples is one that is close to the heart of our colleagues in Ecojesuit, a climate action group headed by Limerick Jesuit Peter (Pedro) Walpole SJ. They held an event on Monday 8th November ‘Faith at the Climate Frontiers’ – Consequences for Oceania and Asia’ which took place at the Ignatian Spirituality Centre in Glasgow and also online. “The average

indigenous is the average of all of us, of humanity”, said Pedro Walpole SJ. This interconnection is the reason why their problems are our problems and we should work together for solutions. The event had several interesting speakers, including Dr Siji Chacko SJ (Director of Conference Development Office of Jesuit Conference of India/South Asia), who said that the global context is very clear to us – in Bangladesh – 15 million people could be displaced due to soil erosion. When any of these climate affected events happen we know that the poor and vulnerable are most impacted.

Despite these stark figures and the worsening effects of climate change, the speakers felt that there was still space for hope, and Pedro Walpole SJ among others restated their commitment to accompany communities in their climate action and in their battle for climate justice.

### **Changing the Narrative**

What the criticisms of COP26 as an elite white event made clear is that people can see through the ‘greenwashing’ – false promises of change to mitigate reputational damage – and want to hear more from the people who are blameless in this crisis, but who are losing their land, their homes and their livelihoods. Let’s hope that COP27 makes space for them.

**Author:** Martina Madden, IJI Communications Officer.

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