

Promotio Iustitiae

Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES), General Curia of the Society of Jesus, Rome, Italy

The Cry of Land and The Cry of the Poor



Cover Image: **Tarahumara, Mexico** (7 June 2007), where two Jesuits and a layman were killed on 20 June 2022. (SJES Archives)

The Cry of Land and The Cry of the Poor



Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES)
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Editorial

Xavier Jeyaraj SJ

*“...I watch as you live with your heads in the sand,
unable to hear the cry of the land.
I was once a ‘Happy Hunting Ground’,
then one day, the eyes of science found
a blue-green planet spinning round a shining star.
The timeless giver of all life offered as a sacrifice,
the priceless finds it’s price, in the greed of man.
You bury your fears and your heads in the sand,
so you’ll never hear the cry of the land,”* wrote the great lyricist Martin Walkyier.

At creation, God ‘saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good’ (Gen. 1:31). But today, our mother earth ‘groans in travail’ (Rom. 8:22) because of irresponsible human use and abuse of this gratuitous gift of God. Sadly, humans think they are the absolute owners of this *blue-green planet* and can do whatever they wish, although they are only fleeting sojourners on earth along with many other creatures. As Patriarch Bartholomew says, “To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God” (LS §8). Let us humbly acknowledge that ‘God always forgives, we humans forgive sometimes, but nature never forgives’ (Pope Francis). Our young generation calls us to act and not just make promises we cannot keep.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si’* (LS), Pope Francis invites us to care for our common home and fellow humans in *Fratelli Tutti* (FT). The Universal Apostolic Preferences (2019-2029), the letter of Fr. General on the Ignatian Year (2019/23) and the letter on the Vow of Poverty (2021/15) invite us to a personal, communitarian and institutional conversion, a necessary step for a compelling apostolic life-mission in the Society of Jesus.

I recall two personal experiences: one as a child when my father helped me recognize the sacredness of the earth and creation and the other as a Jesuit in Kolkata, where I was starkly made aware of the desacralization processes.

My father was a farmer, and we cultivated paddy, lentils and other tropical food crops. I grew up going to our farm early in the morning with my father, and I was always happy to be with him and learn about cultivation. One day when I returned home from school for my summer holidays, I went to the land where my father and mother were working and entered with my sandals on. My father said to me, “Go and put your sandals away. This land gives us food, and it

gives us life. It is sacred, and you cannot enter the sacred place with sandals on." A lesson that has remained deeply ingrained in my heart with a realization of the sacredness of the land.

My second experience was in Kolkata way back in 1996 as a young Jesuit working in the social apostolate. I visited one of the villages where people cultivated vegetables, primarily genetically modified high-yielding pumpkins, eggplants, etc. To have more yield, they used plenty of fertilizers and pesticides. There they told me that as the years passed, farmers began realizing that there were plenty of flowers on the plants, but the yield was less. They realized there was no pollination since no bees or insects like butterflies helped in this agricultural process, and they especially missed the earthworms. The pesticides they used killed all those earthworms and bees. Therefore, the villagers started going to the field early in the morning, plucking the male flower to touch the female flower to pollinate the plants manually. Later on, with the help of an NGO, we began to create awareness of the impact of pesticides and educate them on natural farming and building honeybee farms in the area, which also helped economically.

These are not sporadic experiences of a few. This issue of *Promotio Iustitiae* on *The Cry of Land and the Cry of the Poor* (PI-133) carries 20 articles worldwide. The authors share their profound personal experiences with the land, creation and the poor, theological reflection (Anthony), spirituality on land (Alice, Greg and Sue), case studies, and expertise. Many authors, namely Anjali, Gabriel, Luiz, Peter, Prem, Tshaukuesh and Xavier, explicitly highlight their experiences with the indigenous communities, first nation people or tribals and their struggle to protect the land with an immense sense of gratitude and hope. Others like Peter, Michael and Victoria share their conversion experiences while being with the poor and the indigenous and their realization of the erroneous western approaches or economic models that see the land only as a financial resource for exploitation in the name of growth or development. Farmers' experiences of soil degradation and land dispossession (Emmanuel, Jim, Johana & Pablo, Kevin, and Siju), migrants and refugees (Louie, Natalia & Luis) are also highlighted with an explicit call to change of perspective.

I am sure we have witnessed such things in our countries and continents and felt discomfort and helplessness. It might be good that we learn to wonder at the marvels of creation and how God organized all things to work together, including the microbes in the soil invisible to us. Let us stop and remind ourselves and the people around us of the harm we are inflicting on our earth, given freely to us as a gift from the Creator.

The ecological crisis is getting worse daily, and we realize that it would be impossible to resolve this global crisis only through science and technology. It is not simply about mitigation or adaptation or even making financial commitments. It calls for a complete paradigm shift in our attitudes, spirituality, lives and lifestyles and a revamping of the entire socio-economic, political and cultural system of administration of the environment. People, particularly the young, see the impending global catastrophe that must be handled collectively and comprehensively without further delay and false promises. Through these reflective articles, we wish to help everyone listen attentively to the groans of our earth and the anguished cries of the poor. The poor would encompass particularly the young, the women, the children and

the vulnerable communities who often get dispossessed of their land and its rich natural and mineral resources for their future.

Let me conclude my editorial with a quote from a “native American” in the USA. Jack D. Forbes, in his article, ‘Indigenous Americans: Spirituality and Ecos’, writes (*Daedalus*, 130 (4), 283-300: 2001).

For us, truly, there are no “surroundings”. I can lose my hands and still live. I can lose my legs and still live. I can lose my eyes and still live... But if I lose the air I die. If I lose the sun I die. If I lose the earth I die. If I lose the water I die. If I lose the plants and animals I die. All of these things are more a part of me, more essential to my every breath, than is my so-called body. What is my real body? We are not autonomous, self-sufficient beings as European mythology teaches... We are rooted just like the trees. But our roots come out of our nose and mouth, like an umbilical cord, forever connected with the rest of the world... I am a point of awareness, a circle of consciousness, in the midst of a series of circles. One circle is that which we call “the body”. It is a universe itself, full of millions of little living creatures living their own “separate” but dependent lives... But all of these “circles” are not really separate? They are all mutually dependent upon each other...

Original in English



Land and Spirituality

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*No one owns the water, No one owns the land
No one owns the oceans, No one owns the sand.
These are given, by our mother.
The planet provides for free, only by the hands of the greedy,
does the earth require a fee. (Poet Christopher)*

Land, upon which promises, commitments, and covenants are made, is an integral part of human existence. Civilizations have thrived on lands. Whitney Woollard calls 'land' the "thermometer of covenantal faithfulness" (Woollard, 2018). But today, however, it is exploited by greedy, power-hungry humanity. The year-long protest by the farmers along Delhi borders (India) epitomizes the *angst* of the time. The farmer's agitation sent a strong message worldwide that land is not just a piece of physical property but an extension of the farmers' lives. The right to land is infringed upon when it is repeatedly disregarded or grabbed in the name of mining, industrialization and other forms of developmental work with no compensation and a decent and dignified source of livelihood. One is reminded of the story of Naboth (1 Kg 21), a marginal farmer who goes through a die-hard struggle over land-related issues (VJ John, 2019: 85); such painful stories continue in various forms in different parts of the world. Given this scenario, one can choose to be a silent observer or be like Fr. Stan Swamy, a radical and revolutionary Indian Jesuit who combated the evil forces that indiscriminately seized the land of the poor, leaving them without an identity and making them homeless and strangers in their land where their forefathers had lived, foraged, and cultivated for thousands of years.

Over the years, we have witnessed how leaders with dysfunctional attitudes and priorities can stoop; to capture land. The land that God provided for Adam and Eve "to till and keep" is torn apart by wars, conflicts, bloodshed and injustices. Besides, we also see the exploitation of land by governments in power. But the human spirit is resilient. Though Russia and Ukraine are at war, we see visuals of people, both Russians and Ukrainians, seeking God's intervention. And this spirituality is undefeatable. In this article, I would like to explore the biblical and spiritual implications of land not merely as a source of revenue or a commodity but to underline its sacredness; to underscore God's expectations and our co-responsibility.

Biblical Perspectives on Land

Although "land" is not the core tenet of the biblical faith, it is undoubtedly through such interconnectedness that the Israelites realize their identity as people. Scholars sometimes

wonder how none has made “the concept of Israel and her land the main idea of an Old Testament theology” (H. E. von Waldow, 1974). The quest of the Jews to attain the promised land is central to their history (and Scripture). In the New Testament, we are drawn by Jesus’ parables directly related to land and its bearings (Jn 4:35; Mt 13: 31-32). And finally, the book of Revelation concludes with redeemed humans living in the presence of the Lord in a wholly recreated land (Woollard, 2018).

When God entrusted the land to our first parents, it was accompanied by a mandate: He asked them to till and keep it (Gen 2:15). “Tilling,” in the words of Pope Francis, is “cultivating, ploughing or working, while keeping is caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving” (*Laudato si’* [LS] §65). He further adds that “a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature, and each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations” (LS §65).

God promises Abraham and his descendants a land and declares that he will live with them forever, not just on a tiny piece of land, but across the entire world (Zech 14:9). And “the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine [God’s]; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev 25:23); this is attested again in Psalm 24: 1, which reads: “the earth is the Lord’s.” Therefore, Chris Wright states he who destroys or degrades the earth dirties its reflection of its Maker” (Wright. 1999). Wright reiterates that the land in the biblical world reflects something of God’s character (Ps 19, 29, 65, 104; Job 12: 7-9; Acts 14: 17-27; Rom 1:20). Besides, in the biblical understanding, the land personifies human persons as well, so desecrating land means dishonouring the giver of the land and the receiver (Lev 26:35) (Esther, 2019: 443-453). Hence, humans are not free to ruin or desecrate the land. Prophet Micah denounces such defaulters (Mic 2: 1-3).

The land is “a symbol of the wholeness of joy and well-being characterized by social coherence and personal ease in prosperity, security and freedom” (Brueggemann, 1977). It is far more than a physical, tangible commodity and is inherently connected to one’s faith, identity and societal significance. It is the source of one’s rootedness. Therefore, landlessness is rootlessness that paves the way for futility and meaninglessness (Brueggemann, 1977). The land becomes so fundamental to Israel’s covenantal experience at every point of its history (promise, conquest, possession, misuse, loss, and recovery) that to speak of it is to say of Israel’s special relationship with Yahweh. It is to be used only in ways faithful to Yahweh.

Interestingly, the Old Testament laws relating to social justice are, to a great extent, “laws about the land and the commitment to observing them is indicative of their relationship with God.” In other words, it “is an egalitarian project where the peasant and worker become “partakers”. Hence, rich or poor, Dalit or Tribal, the haves or have-nots have right over the resources of the land, for it is a covenantal gift given freely to all human race, and no one can lord over it (Kunnumparam, 2013:138). Therefore, it is not just a tradable commodity but a living entity that requires fair treatment like each of us deserves; this includes giving rest to the land as well (LS §71).

Spiritual Significance:

Pope Francis, on World Environment Day, 5 June 2013, stated that it is the responsibility of every human being to transform the world into a garden, a habitable place for everyone to live a dignified life. Our mission on this earth is to re-create that garden, lost due to sin and disobedience, into a “*sanctuary*” worthy of living a dignified life. The indigenous people get this so squarely. The three elements that give them their identity are *Jal*, *Jungle* and *Zameen*—i.e., water, forest and land. These have not only been innate in their culture but also have become substantial life-enrichers with social and unifying implications. Their relationship with their land, waters, etc., defines their spirituality. Huston Smith notes that one of the prominent characteristics of the Adivasi belief system is their “embeddedness in their place [the land]” (Huston, 1991: 370). It is unthinkable for them to imagine their lives without land. Achiel Peelman is emphatic when he argues that it is the central “axis for the essential values” and existence in their lives (Peelman, 1995). The number of feasts or festivals associated with nature, such as forest, hunting, agriculture, cattle and other celebrations, shows their total dependence and great love for nature. These festivals help them connect with their Creator, creation, community, and self. Besides, even the surnames of indigenous people are associated with nature, again showing their intimate connection with it. But unfortunately, corporates allied with governments are all set to evict them from their sanctuaries. Such evictions are not a new phenomenon. Therefore, Pope Francis calls on everyone to become “protectors of God’s handiwork...; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS §217).

Land: The Source of Faith

Tribals believe that their forefathers interact with them through the land. So, they offer food and drink to their land and consider it a sacred duty. *Dharti Puja* (prayers offered to the soil) is a revered tradition among the indigenous people before cultivating the field. Also, land as a spiritual entity brings the dead and the living together to keep the memory alive. Consequently, one cannot claim ownership of the land, for it belongs to both the living and dead; it is sacred and inhabited by unseen spirits of the ancestors. These unseen ancestors guard and remain perpetual custodians of these entities. In this regard, Pope Francis has a powerful message to those who disregard and belittle the indigenous communities and their cultural traditions and customs that celebrate mother earth. He affirms:

For them [indigenous people], land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture (LS §146).

One of my friends from Africa, Dorothy Sokwo, when asked about the spirituality of “land” in Africa, said, “The land stands at the heart of everything” (Mufeme, 2022). In 1989, the Zimbabwean Bishops declared this: “Sharing and working together on the land represents a

highly esteemed value both in African culture and in the Christian faith which stresses love and togetherness" (ZCBC, 1982). Sadly, the so-called 'haves' have built their empires on the lands of 'have-nots'. There is a tendency to forget that we are only stewards, tillers and caretakers and have no right to subjugate the weak, feeble, vulnerable creatures and fellow human beings.

Landlessness can shatter one's faith in God. The Israelites were enslaved to a foreign land for forty years; the Babylonian exile experience still reminds us of one's grief at losing land. Jeremiah 51 and Psalm 137 reiterate this story of the faith crisis in losing the God-given land. Given the faith crisis, "Ecological Conversion" is the need of the time as both Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I advocate. (Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics, 2002). They call for "an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation" (Kallarackal, 2019: 127). To these stalwarts, the issue concerning the environment is, as Kallarackal says, not only "economic and technological: it is moral and spiritual."

The bible underpins land as both a covenantal blessing and obedience. The covenantal blessing began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but they lost it due to their transgression. Later, Prophets like Isaiah and Amos, in particular, challenged the oppressors; of injustice and covetousness. But ultimately, humanity experienced God's commitment to his people in Jesus, who preached an inclusive vision, called the kingdom of God, in which even creation experiences liberation; it includes people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 5: 9-10). Hence, our theology must promote a just sharing of land and resources that honours the Creator. *Laudato si'* summarises the notion of the spirituality of the land and our responsibility towards it beautifully.

... we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God ... May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.

God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward (LS §244-245)

The land is a divine gift that binds the recipient to the giver. We, as recipients, are to preserve the gift and bring forth fruits. As sojourners, we must avoid abusing, misusing and overusing it, not depriving future generations; after all, the "earth is the Lords." Therefore, to destroy the earth's waters, land, and air, is degrading its integrity and stripping off its natural order, which is nothing but sin (LS §8). As a reflection of its maker, the world must become a sanctuary of restoration and reconciliation. Our responsibility is to transform the ravaged garden into a reverent, hospitable, and welcoming space all the time (Munther, 2012).

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Original in English



Our Ecological Sins and Making Sacrifices for Our Land

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Eco-spirituality is a term often associated with spiritual practices that allow us to reflect on the natural world, its beauty and God's deep incarnation in the world. It is worth arguing, though, that in this moment of ecological crisis, it is also essential for us to develop eco-spirituality practices that revolve around becoming intimately connected with creation and understanding ourselves not as lords or masters over creation but as integral to its ecology. "An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered...[it] is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness" (LS §§225-230). One of the key ways in which eco-spirituality can grow is through the development of ecological virtues. Ecological virtues have been discussed many times by Johnson and Kureethadam, to name a few. Virtues are, of course, attributes that we value in people. Ecological virtues allow people to understand their relationship with the land and to behave in a way that shows compassion to our earth that is crying out in pain. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains" (Romans 8:22). But what if we focused on the actions we take that cause the pain in the first place. The term we could use for these actions is ecological sins. In a way, they are the opposites of environmental virtues. They are actions or dispositions that disconnect us from creation and add to its pain. This essay will argue the need for eco-spirituality to adopt a practice of individuals reflecting on ecological sins and coming to understand the role that individual sacrifice needs to play in repairing the damage caused by our sins and eventually building ecological virtues.

Scholars have outlined many ecological virtues in the past. Johnson (2014) mentions humility, gratitude and compassion as essential virtues. She also explains that some ethicists argue that adaptability and frugality are other important ecological virtues (p. 281). One list of ecological virtues will be used within this argument to create some symmetry. Kureethadam (2016) analyses Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* and identifies seven ecological virtues. Seven ecological virtues lend themselves nicely to balance because people are often quite familiar with the seven cardinal virtues: chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, kindness, patience and humility. Of course, these are often paired with the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, envy, wrath and pride. Pope Gregory I was known for popularising these two symmetrical lists. Though these two lists can be applied neatly to an ecological framework,

Kureethadam’s (2016) article determines the link between seven ecological virtues and aspects of Laudato Si’. For easy reference, the virtues and their associated quotes in Laudato Si’ are listed in the table below.

Virtue	Quote
Praise	“They also invite other creatures to join us in this praise: ‘Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.’” (LS §72)
Gratitude	“One expression of [gratitude] is when we stop and give thanks to God before and after meals...[it] reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods, and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need.” (LS §227)
Care	“We are called... ‘to cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.’” (LS §14)
Justice	“Every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and underprivileged.” (LS §93)
Work	“Developing the created world in a prudent way is the best way of caring for it, as this means that we ourselves become the instrument used by God to bring out the potential which he himself inscribed in things.” (LS §124)
Sobriety	Sobriety is the ability to renounce what is superfluous and to resist the dominant consumerist mentality. Sobriety is prudence, simplicity, straightforwardness, balance and temperance. Sobriety is seeing the world through God’s eyes and from the side of the poor, sobriety is a style of life which points to the primacy of others as a hierarchical principle and is shown in a life of concern and service towards others. The sober person is consistent and straightforward in all things because he or she can reduce, recover, recycle, repair and live a life of moderation (Pope Francis, 2015b as cited in Kureethadam, 2016, p. 50).
Humility	Once we lose our humility and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end our harming society and the environment. (LS §224)

These virtues continue to be mentioned throughout the encyclical at various points. Just as Pope Francis discusses the virtues that people should endeavour to build within themselves, he also discusses the actions and attributes to avoid. Through a similar academic process of analysis to Kureethadam (2016), the following ecological sins have been identified within Laudato Si’. Seven ecological sins have been extrapolated from the document to maintain symmetry to the virtues and similarity to the cardinal virtues and deadly sins. Some of the ecological sins are similar to or identical to the deadly sins, but the key difference is that the

deadly sins refer to human interactions – greed for the things that we don’t have in comparison to one another, sloth or apathy or disassociation towards one another, and wrath towards another person. Whereas these ecological sins relate to our association with creation. The seven ecological sins proposed are

Sin	Quote
Disassociation	<p>Disassociation from ourselves, from creation and God: Misunderstanding our integral part in creation and positioning screens between ourselves and our loved ones.</p> <p>“Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem of indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions.” (LS §14)</p>
Exploitation	<p>Deliberately destroying and wreaking havoc on our ecosystems to rape and plunder our earth’s resources for economic gain. And also doing the same thing to our brothers and sisters.</p> <p>“Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit.” (LS §159)</p>
Harm	<p>Similar to exploitation, ignoring the cries of the earth and doing so in a way that is not deliberate. It disrespects God as creator and damages our relationship with Him.</p> <p>“This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of goods with which God has endowed her.” (LS §2)</p>
Inequality	<p>Being selfish about our needs and wants contributes to global inequality, and this sin is directly related to how we treat our brothers and sisters.</p> <p>“This vision of ‘might is right’ has endangered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity.”(LS §82)</p>
Waste	<p>To be wasteful of the gifts of creation that have been given to us. Furthermore, to be contributors to the throwaway culture that disposes not just of items that have been used without considering the impact they will have on creation but disposing of our relationships with one another.</p> <p>“The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth... These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture.” (LS §§21-22)</p>
Greed	<p>This sin is no different from the deadly sin of greed, except that we need to be acutely aware that this greed leads to other ecological sins,</p>

	<p>such as exploitation. We have to challenge ourselves not to have more but to be content with what we have and know that we have enough.</p> <p>“We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing them off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet.” (LS §90)</p>
Arrogance	<p>Not unlike the deadly sin of pride, but misunderstanding the incarnation of God in our world.</p> <p>“The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognise any higher instance than ourselves when we see nothing else but ourselves.” (LS §6)</p>

All of these sins ultimately derive from one sin - anthropocentrism, the belief that we as humans are gods on this earth because we are made in His image. To some extent, we must understand that the original sin is the sin of anthropocentrism. Becker (1992) believed that this was the case because we clothe our new-born babies in disposable nappies made from the oils we extract from the depths of the earth. One of the main differences between original sin - a concept that St Augustine coined, and anthropocentrism is that we know through the act of the resurrection, God came to show us that we always were and always will be forgiven. Anthropocentrism is not only a sin against God but a sin against creation. God, deeply incarnate with creation, may be able to forgive us for our actions. Creation is governed by the laws of physics and biology and will not be so forgiving for our actions. Natural disasters we have predicted will get worse, the sea levels are rising, the earth’s temperature is getting hotter, and only we can stop that from happening. We can only understand the enormity of this false belief of anthropocentrism by breaking it down into its parts.

These ecological sins and virtues can help build an eco-spirituality that overcomes anthropocentrism and brings us back to a connection to the land. The most challenging part of utilising this method of developing an eco-spirituality is acknowledging sin. Acknowledging sin and asking for forgiveness on any given day is a challenge we must overcome. We must teach ourselves to avoid ecological sins to build ecological virtues. How can we say that we are being sober when we continue to exploit the earth? How can we say we are acting for justice when there is still inequality? How can we say that we care for creation while still harming it? Overcoming our sins helps us to build virtues. And identifying our sinful actions is the only way to begin that process. Over time, we can then come to repair the earth, reconcile our relationships with one another and build a stronger relationship with our God.

When we identify our sinful actions, we must change our behaviours to begin the process of reparation. This behaviour change will often result in a sacrifice. Our anthropocentric dispositions are fuelled mainly by the societal expectation to have more, want more, and be more convenient. Those who live privileged lives contribute to a more significant proportion of environmental harm and exploitation, as we know from the research. We need to reject our

want for more and convenience. This requires sacrificing our time, our money or our reputations and ego. For example, suppose we are to help reduce the exploitation of workers who aren't paid a living wage. In that case, if we are to reduce the amount of clothing waste that we contribute and if we are to become sober in our habits, we must consider reducing the amount of clothing we buy. Every time we purchase an item of clothing that does not come from a fair-trade source, we send a message that we value the product we purchased and the methods used to create it. We are also contributing to the pollution caused by the production and disposal of these items. We must then sacrifice by re-wearing, repairing, repurposing, wearing out, handing down and thrifting our clothing. These actions help us avoid the sins of exploitation, harm and waste and build the virtues of sobriety, gratitude and care.

Another example is when we choose to reduce the use of our fossil fuel-guzzling cars. When we purchase fuel, we send a message that we value that product and will use it. We are contributing to the exploitation of the earth, and the ongoing harm to the planet, both in the way the fuel is extracted and the emissions it produces. When we choose to ride a bike, take public transport, walk or at least car-pool, we reduce the harm done to the planet. We, therefore, are caring for creation.

When we spend too much time on our screens and locked indoors, we continue to disassociate ourselves from creation. We fail to sit in awe and wonder of God's work, praising His name. When we plant a monoculture lawn at the front of our house as a symbol of status and tear out our native species to create perfectly manicured gardens, we prohibit the natural world's ability to praise God by its being while harming creation. Who are we to stop that praise? When we spend time in awe and wonder, regenerate the earth and allow our native species to thrive, we enable all organisms to worship God.

These actions that aim to overcome sin require purposeful reflection on our intimate connection with creation. The act of reflecting and discerning our behaviours helps us to build an eco-spirituality. I leave you with one final note: If there was ever a time when we needed to make selfless sacrifices for the earth, it is now in the midst of the ecological crisis. Through sacrifice, we see the world differently, in a way that is more intimately connected with the Earth.

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Original in English



Cursed by Stuck Belief: Loosening up a Spirituality of Land

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Is Scripture a lubricant or coagulant? How we answer this question will determine how we relate to truth. Lubricants allow for snug pieces of matter to move together. Lubricants loosen objects tightly cinched. Lubricants cut friction, reducing the amount of energy needed to perform work. Coagulants, on the other hand, congeal liquids, decrease fluidity and clot blood, which can save the body from bleeding to death but can also strain the heart. The sacred writ can be read and used as a lubricant or a coagulant. In what follows, I will apply scripture to facilitate movement in current understandings of human intimacy and alienation concerning land.

Severe friction occurs from the very biblical start. No sooner is revelation out of the gates than it seizes up in a passage that has constrained every page and generation that has followed. In telling the story of how things began. The Book of Genesis appears to have gone beyond a metaphorical description of facts (i.e., that the relationship between humans and land has become strained and disharmonious) to prescribing a disastrous future. Harmful ambiguity slithers into the text when it narrates God cursing the land because of human consumption.

*And to the man, God said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.*

*By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return." (Gen 3:17-19)*

Underhandedly, taking what is not permitted is supposed to end badly. When harvesting the goods of the Earth goes against the established order of creation, the land will surely suffer.

Natural abundance thins, and human intervention grows more taxing, as much of the land is overworked as humans are overworked. Such are the sad facts. But for centuries now, this passage has held a kind of prescriptive power over the Judeo-Christian imagination. It has been read as not just what unfortunately results when humans take what hasn't been given, but what should and must happen. In other words, an interpretation coagulates into a fixed belief that makes God the cursing agent, and, presumably, whatever the Creator God curses must remain so cursed until full redemption kicks in at the end of times. But if it's actually illicit, harmful human consumption that in itself does the cursing, not God, then the condemnation is no more necessary than the voluntary, destructive behaviour. Change the conduct, therefore, and lift the curse. There is nothing divinely ordained or predestined here at all. Indeed, the greatest threat to the land and our relationship to it is to shift the responsibility of our disconnection and antagonism onto God and off us. Once we remember that only our wilfulness curses the land, we can come back to it through attentiveness and solicitude.

Of course, unlawful consumption (taking more than what is given) will always remain a sore temptation for humans. It could well constitute our chief spiritual challenge. The human ego is avaricious. Nonetheless, we have innate capacities for care, reciprocity and connection. In general, indigenous spiritualities depart from our primary belonging to the land, not our secondary estrangement from it. Genesis tacitly agrees, but here again, we need a lubricating reading of Scripture to loosen the corroded nuts and bolts of our beliefs. Rather than understanding mortality as a consequence of sin, we can embrace it as precisely both the seed and soil of our humanity. That we ultimately return to the ground from which we were taken means we can never stray too far from it. Carelessness and forgetfulness can hoodwink us into rusty convictions of not belonging and, furthermore, cause an inevitable enmity between us and the rest of creation. But our essential connection always re-emerges from the thawing ground as soon as we ease up the curse of pernicious, ungrateful consumption. Here again, as commonly occurs, what we believe determines the range of our possible behaviours.

St. Paul likes to write a happy ending to Genesis by casting Christ as a second Adam, who removes the sins that make Creation groan enslaved. Too often, however, this Second Adam is seen as hopelessly transcendent, utterly removed from the dust and ashes (aka soil) to which humanity belongs. The result is a more uprooted theology and side-tracked spirituality that escapes the mundane world rather than inhabits it. This practical disconnect is perhaps most obvious and egregious in our Eucharistic theologies and practices. Paradoxically, the very sacrament that should most ground us to the Earth most often whisks us away from it.

A lubricating Gospel will help us move forward here. Fed up with the closed-mindedness of those who oppose him, Jesus attempts to wake them to their narrowness. With deep feeling and frustration, he declaims:

“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.’ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred? And you say, ‘Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.’ How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar

that makes the gift sacred? So, whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it; and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it". (Mt. 23:16-21)

In our churches, of course, we tend to believe or at least act as if we believe that the Eucharistic action lends reverence to the altar. Perhaps that is so. But if John Paul II is correct in stating that "even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). In that case, we have to move to a different scale of operations. On that level, Jesus' question trumps our old, congealed theologies: "which is greater, the gift or the altar?" In other words, the Eucharist comes to us as the continued and continuous work of the Incarnation. The Creator loved the world so much that God wanted to enter it fully. Without the Earth, the Incarnation would have nowhere to take place. The Earth, in philosophical terms, is the condition of the possibility of the Incarnation. No Earth, no Christ. Thus, ultimately the Earth as an altar consecrates the Eucharist. More fundamental than even *in persona Christi*, the priest presides in the Mass as *in persona terrae*.

Jesus' frustration with the "blind guides" is that they end up exhausting themselves, getting nowhere by putting the cart before the horse. The gift can only exist as a gift if there is an open place to receive it. The reception is as essential as the donation. In this context, altars always precede the sacrifice. When it comes to the gift and sacrifice of the Eucharist, the same thing applies: its sanctity depends on the holiness and integrity of the Earth that gives rise to its being. Any Eucharistic celebration that falls short of connecting us to the land from which both its elements and we were taken threatens to become a liturgy of noisy gongs or clanging cymbals, to borrow from I Corinthians. In our Eucharistic piety, we often strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. We guard and cherish the tiniest particle of the species with utmost reverence. Meanwhile, once outside the sanctuary, the average Canadian trashes 400 kg of food per year per capita. Globally, more than 30 % of all food produced goes unceremoniously to waste in the field, during processing and transportation due to retail scrupulosity, and in the home owing to neglect or lack of creativity. Is any gram of that food not equally a sacred gift as every piece of holy communion?

I am fond of quoting an acquaintance who used this bon mot: "I have no problem believing that Jesus is in the host. What's difficult for me is believing that the host is bread!" This difficulty is emblematic of our denaturalised conception and celebration of the Eucharist. The very thing that should most connect us to Earth (again, the condition of the possibility for all things grown, harvested, baked and eaten) too frequently sends us off into an ethereal realm of landlessness. Food provides us with a living, inevitable proof every day of our mortality and our belongingness to the Earth from which we were taken. Food is land incarnate and sacrificial. Food is our primary means of connection not only to land but also to all other Earth-dependency. Our mothers feed us off their bodies, laying down the archetype of all human bonding. If food is land and Eucharist is food, then every actual reception of the Eucharist affirms our primordial connection to Earth.

A spirituality of land needs to extend the Catholic reverence with which the Eucharist is produced and consumed. Thankfully, we already have just about everything we require.

What we generally lack is scope and imagination. “Thankfully”, of course, is the key here. Eucharist means thanksgiving, and enjoyed, conscious gratitude becomes the source of all our reverential actions. We can lift the curse that our disrespectful consumption casts down on the land through thankful harvesting, informed by a spirit of awed reception. Have we not to marvel, every time we eat, of the generosity of Earth that draws us close both by our hunger and its fulfilment? Without hunger, our humanity would escape us. Without its satisfaction, our gratitude would starve. Food makes us doubly human in this way. If we can learn to take what is given from the ground, from where we were born, we will always eat Eucharistically. Communion then becomes concretely catholic, genuinely universal.

As with consuming, so too with producing. Our traditional spirituality equips us well to return respectfully to the land. If every priest imagined himself a skilled, sensitive farmer carefully cultivating food for friends and family, our Masses would have more practical, ecological consequences. We might practice what we preach and preach more of our belongingness to the land. Likewise, if every farmer imagined herself a priest, consecrating the fruits of her labour on the altar of the land, much of the desecration of earth and animals perpetrated by modern industrial agriculture would naturally be replaced by modes of cultivation far less violent and domineering. When we wring our nourishment out of the body of the Earth, our wantonness with food waste and our studied lack of compassion towards the rest of Creation indicts our hypocrisy as a Eucharistic people. We might not consider ourselves guides, but we certainly are blind agriculturalists and consumers. The land waits in expectation for us authentically to live our faith.

As a spiritual director, so much of my work involves helping people undo the horrid knots of worthlessness, shame and scrupulosity that alienate them from the rest of Creation (human and other-than-human) and the Creator. Humans have such a strong penchant for “living in sin,” exaggerating our culpability, harm, despicability, and wretchedness. Why it taxes us so thoroughly to believe we are loveable and loved confounds our understanding and deepest desires. On the collective level, the same sorry story gets told *ad nauseam*: that *homo sapiens* are a plague on the planet and don’t belong. Nature would be better off without us. Colloquially put, human life sucks! But this is coagulum-thought. It is useless, static jelly, equally false as it is despairing. As a species, we are loved no less than as individuals. We belong in our totality, one and many. Until we believe that, our faith will fall short of healing us and the land from which we were taken. Faith that we are given to Earth for thanksgiving is what makes us a Eucharistic people born of soil and to soil gratefully returning.

Original in English



Looking after Country as Sister, Mother Earth: A Dream to Do

Sue Martin

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"If you don't look after Country, Country won't look after you." - April Bright, 1992
"Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth." - St Francis of Assisi

April Bright, a First Nations woman born in 1953 in the Northern Territory, Australia, belongs to the MakMak people. April's wisdom, which she first shared in 1992, has been with me and has become my mantra for the transformation I dream of seeing for our Sister, Mother Earth.

April and many other First Nation leaders say that caring for the Country includes caring for people, animals, plants, the dead, and the yet-to-be-born. There is a sea Country, land Country, and sky Country too, and it exists both in and through time.

This is very much what Teilhard de Chardin, Hildegard of Bingen and many other mystics of our Church have shared with us.

"Teilhard asks us to love God but also to love the earth; we seek communion with God and a communion with Earth and communion with God through Earth," said Eugene Stockton in "Wonder a Way to God" 2019.

Finding God in all things is the mission at the heart of what it is to be Ignatian. Our Ignatian spirituality is also a call to care for Country. St Ignatius had a personal experience of God in the 'other'. His was an incarnational faith. He came to see, hear and feel God through people and all creation. We see this clearest in his description of his conversion experience at the Cardoner river:

Near the road is a stream, on the bank of which he sat and gazed at the deep waters flowing by. While seated there, the eyes of his soul were opened. He did not have any special vision, but his mind was enlightened on many subjects, spiritual and intellectual. So clear was this knowledge that from that day everything appeared to him in a new light. Such was the abundance of this light in his mind that all the divine helps received, and all the knowledge acquired up to his sixty-second year, were not equal to it.

Ignatius' profound spiritual awakening at the Cardoner river is similar to what people call the ecological conversion experience today.

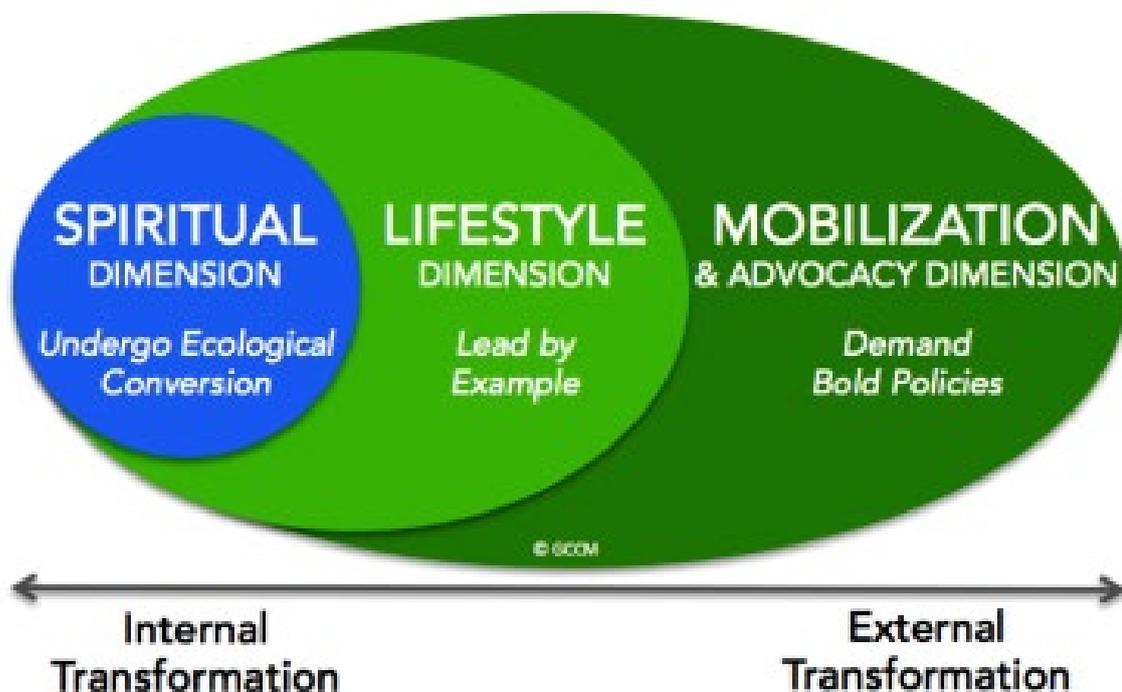
Can we sit by our river or in our place today to undertake the contemplative practice to care for Country, hear the call of Sister, Mother Earth, to have a heart that is bursting not only with environmental consciousness but an ecological conversion that connects with the Divine?

Peter Saunders conference coordinator of the recent International Ignatian Ecospiritual Conference¹, which was part of the celebration marking the 500 years of Ignatius' ecological conversion, explains this experience for us.

“In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius invites you into a conversion through an intimate encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. This loving encounter with Jesus transforms your heart, bringing forth great desires to want to serve Christ in the world in your own unique way. In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis is inviting you into an ecological conversion. This is not just being concerned about the environment. This is a call to have your heart transformed again, this time drawn into the deeper relationship with the Presence that is God in all Creation”.

This invitation into an ecological conversion experience may still feel very abstract. The term ecological conversion is attributed to Saint John Paul II in his 2001 World Day for Peace speech. Saint John Paul II was challenging Christians to not only change their actions but to change their hearts and minds concerning how they engage with the environment and to undergo an ecological conversion.

The Laudato Si' Movement which Ecojesuit was a foundation member, has created a beautiful meme that shows the journey we are all on.



¹ <https://iiec.org.au/>

The Internal Transformation, which has a spiritual dimension, is an ecological conversion. It works towards external transformation, the new way of living where we mobilise others to develop integral ecology communities.

Before any external transformation can happen in the world, we must have an internal transformation in our hearts, and this inner transformation starts with an ecological conversion experience.

Laudato Si' encourages us to take responsibility and care for the earth as we would wish to care for our very own blood sister. For many, it is the call to tread gently on the earth - to reduce their ecological footprint. Such personal endeavours are essential but are not going to get society to the transformation that is needed.

Kevin McDonnell, a Christian Brother, living on Archer Mountain in Brisbane, Australia, unpacks ecological conversion in his essay "The Role of Place in Ecological Conversion".

"Archer Mountain represents place as a way to experience ecological conversion. Is it finding the sacred where we are?"

I see the call to care for Country as the mantra we need across our Ignatian communities, but what does it look like in practice?

The Being with God in Nature ministry, part of the Jesuit and Ignatian Spirituality Australia (JISA), provides the opportunity for ecological conversion:

"There are opportunities to spend some contemplative time in nature. To enter into that contemplative place in your heart to encounter the Presence God in Nature, which leads to ecological conversion and reconciliation with Creation."

The US Ignatian Solidarity Network has an ecological conversion pledge.

Can we, as an Ignatian community, build experiences of ecological conversion into our work and personal/communal prayer life? Could each Conference have an ecological conversion program?

My dreams are for us to become Regenerative communities. But before this outer transformation in our world can occur, we need the inner transformation of ecological conversion to happen to everyone. This is a BIG dream!

The Mercy Integral Ecology Emerging Leaders Fellowship has ecological conversion as a pivotal experience in Australia. This fully funded, 12 months (part-time) fellowship program is for those already passionate about the care of our common home. The fellowship offers emerging leaders a range of opportunities for learning and experience to enable them and their communities to respond to these challenges.

There are Five Components of the Program.

1. Experience

There are three Engagements and Encounters in the areas of regeneration, healing and active hope.

2. Learn

Guided by the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform framework, we will engage in a multi-disciplinary course of learning designed to embrace the challenges of our time. This will include monthly webinars, reading modules and experiences to learn about *Laudato Si'*. It will integrate Indigenous wisdom, Integral Ecology, the Universe Story, Earth systems, eco-theology, designing regenerative cultures, leadership, advocacy, spirituality, facilitation, grant application writing and other topics. We will learn not only about ecology but also about ourselves and our community.

3. Reflect

During the program, each fellow will be supported by a relevant mentor who will help guide them in aspects of their reflection and insights into the program. Each of the three live-in experiences will develop a contemplative stance. The role of the mentor will also be to guide the development of the personal project.

4. Act

Get involved in the bio-regional community, joining a local community group working towards regeneration, e.g., keeping the local waterways clean, enabling access to local organic food, a climate action group or keeping the local remnant forest protected.

5. Create

Each Fellow, working closely with a mentor, will be required to choose a pertinent Integral Ecology issue related to the degradation/regeneration of Earth and /or the displacement of peoples. The fellow will undertake a personal project that educates, moves, informs and/or provides specific actions for justice concerning this issue. This will be shared with a public audience towards the end of the program.

I dream that the Mercy Integral Ecology fellowship program, which is underway in 2022 in Australia, and in which I am privileged to be a mentor, will grow. Our Ignatian community will find a way to participate. We need so many Integral Ecology fellows!

How do we know an internal transformation has happened when we undertake an ecological conversion experience?

There is a growing understanding of measuring our environmental consciousness, known as the New Environmental Paradigm Scale. Building on this, we need a measurement for our ecological conversion consciousness and a scale to measure our sense of how our integral ecology transformation is progressing!

Professor L. Suganthi, a researcher from Anna University, Chennai, offers a scale to measure and assess a person's attitude to nature. In doing this, she lists personal values, attitudes and behaviour toward nature that she regarded as indicative of an underlying eco-spirituality. The following is a sample:

- I belong to this universe
- I nurture the environment
- I feel honoured to participate in any proactive action taken for the environment
- I perceive a sense of wonder, seeing the complexity of this universe
- I feel this universe is precious
- I have an organic relationship with this universe
- I feel a sense of mystery in being part of this universe

These, together with the others she has listed, are values, attitudes and behaviour that one would expect to find in someone who has experienced environmental conversion. They provide a helpful guide for designing processes focused on particular outcomes, enhancing their chances of fostering conversion at this level.

Another source of ideas is the creative work of Christine Valters Paintner, *Earth Our Original Monastery*. In this reflection on contemplative living in the modern world through the lens of the Western monastic tradition of closeness to nature, she has devised seven sets of transformative practices under such headings as 'Earth as the Original Cathedral', 'Earth as the Original Scriptures', and so on. Under each heading, the practices include reading, scripture reflection, meditation, contemplative walk, a ritual with herbs, artistic expression, writing and a blessing. These are rich resources for fostering ecological conversion experiences.

Ecological conversion experiences were recently aired on our Australian mainstream TV series "Back to Nature". Each episode focused on a connection to place, contemplative practices, and spirituality from a First Nation community and others wanting to live in harmony with nature. For me, each episode was a 30-minute eco-retreat.

The objectives of the TV documentary program "Back to Nature" included:

- Create a nation of nature protectors, understanding that people protect what they love.
- Inspire people to preserve, protect and create natural spaces.
- Inform and educate people about the physical and mental health benefits of connecting with nature.
- Make spending time in and connecting to nature an integral part of people's lives.
- Change the conversation from 'human beings are separate from nature' to an understanding that 'humans are a part of nature'.
- Create awareness that human health and the landscape's health are deeply interdependent, which aligns with Australia's First Nations' paradigm.

It is inspiring to see the call to care for Country and co-create Regenerative integral ecology communities coming from the wider community. Mother Earth has many protectors.

The external transformation we need to see happen in our world is a new way of living with Mother Earth. What could this new way of living look like?

Daniel Christian Wahl talks about the three horizons framework. One horizon is business as usual (keeps our world in crisis), another is disruptive innovation opportunities (assists with the transformation), and the third, we need to move toward getting a viable world with a Transformative horizon with a Regenerative Cultures framework.

We need to move from the Anthropocene! The call to leave the Anthropocene can be heard in Glenn Albrecht, an Australian environmental philosopher who pioneered the mental health concept of Solastalgia – lived experience of negative environmental change. Glenn calls for a new age -the Symbiocene. The term, Symbiocene, is from ‘symbiosis’, which is derived from the Greek *sumbiosis* (companionship), *sumbion* (to live together) *sumbios* (living together), *bios* (life) and *cene* (period). Glenn explains, “In the Symbiocene, human action, culture and enterprise will be exemplified by those cumulative types of relationships and attributes nurtured by humans, that enhance mutual interdependence and mutual benefit for all living beings (desirable), all species (essential) and the health of all ecosystems (mandatory).”

In the Go Deep Green course developed by the Thomas Berry-inspired Ecozoic Living concept, the ultimate goal is a co-flourishing of people, place, and planet together.

Thomas Berry shares that Earth is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. Earth exists and can survive only in its integral functioning. Ecozoic Living is learning to be present on the planet mutually beneficially. Ecozoic Living invites shifting out of the mode of fixing - our lives, our communities, the planet - and into participating as a part of the whole community of life on Earth as Integral Ecologists!!

‘In the Go Deep Green course, you will be invited to reflect on what science is able to tell us about the origins and processes of the universe...and to wonder about where human beings fit into the epic on-going story of evolution. You will be invited to reflect on what made you fall in love with Earth in the first place... because that is your most reliable, most renewable source of energy for the work of co-creating a better Earth future.’

Another course called Awakening the Dreamer uses the See–Judge–Act process to lead people to be the change that they want to see in the world. Annie Leonard’s Story of Stuff helped my transformation journey.

Can the Laudato Si’ Goals help us create the Regenerative community we need? YES

In the Society of Jesus in Australia, every Ministry must report annually on their Care for Our Common Home. Our first Laudato Si’ Action Framework report has been shared with the Australian Jesuit leadership team. This report shows that most ministries are well advanced in this process. Each has a different starting point and resources, so their plans and outcomes are unique. The Australian Jesuit Care for our Common Home Committee supports this long-term transformation within our Province.

Can we, as an Ignatian community across our globe, be the change we want to see in the world? Can we pivot to become regenerative communities – gifting to; not stealing from the future?

I believe we must, we can, and we will, but it will take much disruption and sometimes failure as we try new ways of co-creating integral ecology Ignatian communities for our future.

“We are in an extractive economy that takes life and concentrates wealth. Any time we take life, whether it be the life of a community, soil, oceans, species, insects, cultures, forests or human rights, it is degenerative. Regeneration is a pivot. It chronicles and delineates how to do a 180 and move to regenerative outcomes. The current socio-economic system is stealing the future – climatically, biologically, culturally, ethnically and generationally.” Paul Hawken

Original in English



The Climate Agenda: A Cry of the Earth and the Poor

Anjali Roberts

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Yesterday I discussed with a friend about our own choices in the face of the climate crisis. My friend used to be a financial advisor. Our conversation touched on ethical principles for investing, and I suggested one way to avoid companies where profits flowed to inhumane governments. My friend asked, 'Do you agree with everything the (Australian) Government does?' 'No', I said, 'they are not particularly humane.' He said, 'There you go,' implying there is no point in investing in the global climate adaptation ethically, as I clearly was not even able to influence my own government based on that approach.

Our conversation then moved to personal choices in daily living. He asked how he could contribute, and I suggested he could firstly inform himself based on the biggest emissions contributors. Then, he could (i) Switch his electricity source to a renewable one, (ii) Reduce his travel in private petrol-fuelled transport and (iii) Reduce his consumption of meat. He had already installed solar panels, taking advantage of a financial incentive and was now saving money. He would not do (ii) and (iii) as he said he could not, as his priority was feeding his family. For income, he wakes up at 3 am each Saturday and drives to a market to sell bacon and egg rolls that sell out by 11 am. Our conversation had warmed well beyond 1.5°C, and we decided to leave it there.

Later, I reflected on the arc of the conversation and why it played out in the way it did. Perhaps you believe that the choices you exercise do not matter and cannot influence outcomes, even those that may benefit you or your children in the longer term. What remains is to take actions that will, at the very least, benefit you now and not create a deficit (most obviously financially.) But the bigger question I pondered was: *what makes choices that detrimentally affect our planet's health and wellbeing, for example, choosing private over public transport and consuming animal products available to us in Australia, with such impunity?*

As a non-Indigenous, Indian woman who migrated from post-colonial India to the settler colony of Australia, the threads of this impunity are woven like an *ikat*, colours bleeding and blending, the warp and weft unrecognisable. Australia is a settler colony that still does not constitutionally recognise its First Peoples, whose wealth is built on killing First Nations People and displacing them from their land. The extraction of minerals from this land, which disproportionately contributes to CO2 emissions historically, continues to do so even today and further exposes those disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

While the media and climate movements widely discuss the colonial-capitalist-extractive origins of the climate crisis, it is only in the recent IPCC's Working Group II's Sixth Assessment report that colonialism is acknowledged as one of the causes of the unequal impacts of the climate crisis. According to the Technical Summary of the Report:

Complex human vulnerability patterns are shaped by past developments, such as colonialism and its ongoing legacy, are worsened by compounding and cascading risks and are socially differentiated.

The legacy of colonialism and compounded vulnerability was exposed in a 2021 Covid-19 outbreak in Wilcannia, in western NSW. With the town having a high proportion of First Nations people (over 60%), whose life expectancy is half of that expected for other Australians, the city was already vulnerable. Residents could not access fresh food when the only shop in town closed due to the outbreak. A Barkindji woman said her cousin, who had hunted kangaroo and wanted to share it with other residents, was prevented by NSW Health from doing so. Further, isolation at home was also challenging, given the housing problems. Aboriginal people account for 20% of people experiencing homelessness, including living in crowded accommodations, despite being 3% of the population. The ability to respond to the challenge was severely restricted due to the many vulnerabilities of health, income, geography and, most significantly, the cancellation of connection to land and culture.

The IPCC report noted that climate change is *expected to have adverse impacts on wellbeing and further threaten mental health; and that children and adolescents, particularly girls, and people with existing mental, physical and medical challenges, are at risk.*

We know from previous reports that women are more likely than men to be affected by climate change. UN figures indicate that 80% of people displaced by climate change are women. Mainly, women are disproportionately poor, making it more difficult to recover from and adapt to disasters, which affect infrastructure, livelihood and housing.

Women's roles as primary caregivers covering the provision of water, food and resources for heating and cooling render them highly dependent on natural resources in rural areas and more exposed to the effects of climate change, including drought, uncertain rainfall and deforestation, making it harder to secure these resources. Finally, historical disadvantages women face, including limited access to decision-making, land ownership, and economic assets, are magnified by the challenges of climate change and present an increased risk of violence during periods of instability.

It is not surprising then that our attention is directed to addressing these drivers, framed in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals. Without a view toward eradicating poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), building gender equity (SDG 5) and reducing inequality (SDG 10), the climate crisis' impacts will continue growing and disproportionately, despite efforts to mitigate and adapt to net-zero emissions.

The Report notes that climate action and sustainable development are interdependent and that '*Sustainable development is fundamental to capacity for climate action, including directly towards reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as well as enhancing social and ecological resilience to climate*

change. This reinforcement *'that a true ecological approach **always** becomes a social approach; [it] must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, to hear **both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor,**'* is instructive as we plan the action.

We know from the Report that to date, efforts have not closed the *'the adaptation gap'* and that *'Governance arrangements and practices are presently ineffective to reduce risks, reverse path-dependencies and maladaptation, and facilitate climate-resilient development.*

Catholics worldwide have significant institutional and societal capacity at global, regional, and local scales. Many are active within the societal systems they find themselves in, including the Catholic societal system, to advance human well-being and planetary health. Informed by the Report, below are three calls to action, as much for me as for the communities I am part of:

1. *Support indigenous self-determination, recognise Indigenous Peoples' rights, and support Indigenous knowledge-based adaptation*

In Australia, this could be calling on your Members of Parliament to support The Uluru Statement from the Heart for a First Nations Voice to be enshrined in the Constitution; and speaking to Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling about our history; and to support access to lands and development and integration of Indigenous knowledge towards adaptation. At the same time, 'using the principles of recognitional, procedural, and distributional justice', acknowledging and paying respect to First Nations people in our homes and workplaces, in sacred places and at bus stops, at birthday parties and citizenship ceremonies, through words, signs, symbols and relationships; and supporting local and community initiatives focused on access to land and knowledge development. For me, this also means supporting similar initiatives led by *Adivasis* in Jharkhand and other indigenous groups in India.

2. *Taking climate action based on consideration of the intersection of gender with race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, Indigenous identity, age, disability, income, migrant status, and geographical location.*

This looks like the centring voices of women and those with intersecting vulnerabilities, such as young women of migrant backgrounds, in decision-making relating to climate adaptation strategies. For us at the Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, this means working with women and children seeking asylum to shape programs to ensure their food security and income protection. For me, this looks like seeking out voices of women, particularly women of colour, to inform my thinking around the climate issue. For example, *The Jacaranda Tales*, organised by Bangalore Film Society, featured 25 films on Women and Nature.

3. *Monitoring and evaluation frameworks that incorporate questions of justice*

This involves unravelling the threads of impunity to understand what justice looks like and for whom. It requires investing in building the capacity of non-traditional governance agencies like Catholic parish communities to articulate a path or theory of change, establish measurement frameworks, gather data and be accountable as a part of the larger national,

regional and global institution of the Catholic Church. This also means incorporating gender equity and wellbeing indicators into climate action plans.

Original in English



Supporting the Struggle for Hope: The Plight of Kuy Indigenous Communities in Cambodia

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In the last two years, many of the indigenous Kuy peoples in the villages, living around Prey Lang forest, whose culture, spirituality and livelihood depend on the forest land, have met great adversity and opposition, not only from illegal loggers but also from local authorities and the state government itself. So much of the land they depend on is being degraded and destroyed for others' short-term profit. Yet, despite so many challenges, their love for the land urges them to resist, hoping the situation will eventually change for the better. Our mission continues to be to support their voices, to help strengthen their local communities and to hope for a future of positive change.

Prey Lang Forest, a Land Blessed

The Prey Lang forest, spanning around 700,000 hectares, is found at the intersection of four Cambodian provinces located in the central north of the country, west of the Mekong River from Laos. The forest lies within three watersheds, all supporting the Mekong River-Tonle Sap Lake hydrological system. This Mekong and Tonle Sap river system is the world's largest and most productive freshwater fishery, from which Cambodians, even the poor, have been getting most of their protein nutrition. The Prey Lang forest and the Indo-Burma region are Cambodia's most extensive lowland evergreen forests.

In a biodiversity survey commissioned by the government of Cambodia, with the report released in 2015, it was found that Prey Lang was actually composed of eight forest types, with evergreen, semi-evergreen and deciduous dipterocarp forests forming the majority. This diversity in habitat translates to a large number of different species occupying these ecosystems: insects, reptiles, bats, mammals (including three of the largest animals in Cambodia: the Banteng, Gaur and Asian Elephant), birds (whose number of species constitutes 44% of all those in the country), etc. Thus, with such a high biodiversity value, the Prey Lang forest became part of a system named in 2015 as one of the 36 biodiversity hotspots in the world. However, in May 2016, Prime Minister Hun Sen declared only about 360,000 hectares (51.4%) as Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Main Characters

Kuy Indigenous Community: The Kuy ethnic group has traditionally been in the region where Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia meet each other, from the southern part of eastern Thailand to the banks of the Mekong River in southern Laos to the central northern lands of Cambodia. The Kuy language is spoken to varying degrees by around 500,000 people in this region. Most of those who identify as Kuy come from Thailand (80%), followed by Cambodia (12%) and Laos (8%).

According to the census 2019, within Cambodia, the Kuy ethnic group consisting of around 70,000 people, is the largest (25%) among the 24 indigenous communities. The Kuy people are recognized as aboriginal inhabitants of the country, referred to as *Khmer boran* meaning ‘ancient Khmer.’ In centuries past, the Kuy people in Cambodia were known for their production of iron and are believed to have supplied processed iron as their tribute to the seats of power during the Angkor Empire. Today, the Kuy people continue living in and finding cultural and spiritual identity in Prey Lang. Their sacred sites are found in specific areas within the forest and for harvesting non-timber forest products, such as liquid oleoresin from *Dipterocarpus* trees. It is said that “Prey Lang” comes from the Kuy language and means “the forest which belongs to us all”.

Economic Land Concessions and the Oknhas: Since the early 1990s, when peace was slowly coming back to Cambodia, land concessions were being given by the government to those seeking to create business and economic activity. These grants were formalised in the Land Law of 2001, defined as an Economic Land Concession (ELC) for a long-term (99 years max.) lease of land with a maximum of 10,000 hectares to a private corporation. The private corporation received the rights to clear forested land to develop large-scale agro-industrial production. Officially, the rationale for ELCs is to generate employment and livelihood opportunities, encourage investments and increase state revenue.

Shortly after 2001, the number of ELCs proliferated with rising complaints and reported violations. By 2008, ELCs started turning up inside protected areas, with licenses issued by the Ministry of Environment. Those companies were logging within protected areas, an act prohibited by the Protected Areas Law of 2008. In the case of the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary case, although current maps do not show ELC properties inside its boundaries, there have been many recorded instances. The connection between illegal logging within the protected area, including the Kuy people’s valuable resin trees, and the nearby ELCs have been documented. It is common among the villagers that timber from Prey Lang continues to be laundered through the ELCs situated just outside the forest.

At the head of many ELCs are influential business people known as *oknhas*. The title *oknha* (meaning “lord” or “nobleman”) is several centuries old. In the 1700s, the king would confer the designation of *oknha* upon loyal special envoys who faithfully served the monarchy. Today, an *oknha* is the highest honorific title the king can bestow on a civilian. Usually, the person must have given at least US\$ 500,000 to the government while continuing to provide benefits for the citizens of Cambodia. In turn, the *oknha* receives many privileges, such as tax exemptions, and holds considerable societal authority. Unsurprisingly, *oknhas* belong to an

elite circle and have close ties to the economic and political powers of the country. In 2007, a report by Global Witness presented evidence linking large-scale forest crimes with several ELCs, the *oknhas* who own them, and some of the highest levels in the Cambodian government.

Ministry of Environment: Founded in 1996, the Ministry of Environment (MOE) has had a broad mandate including but not limited to ensuring water quality in public areas, safeguarding natural resources, and managing solid waste. The MOE was one of only two government agencies authorized to give ELC licenses until 2012, when Hun Sen officially halted issuing new grants. A government report in 2015 revealed that over the years, nearly 2 million hectares had been granted as ELCs to 230 companies, around half of which were issued by the MOE. It is rather strange that the agency responsible for the ELCs and that of the protected areas such as the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary are the same.

From Bad to Worse, 21 February 2020

On Friday, 21 February 2020, hundreds of villagers—men, women and children, mostly of Kuy descent, environmental activists, human rights advocates and Buddhist monks made their way early in the morning from their respective provinces' surroundings Prey Lang, to meet inside the forest for their annual tree-blessing ceremony. Most people travelled by foot, and a few by motorcycles, bringing rice and some dried food for the weekend. The ceremony was expected to last a couple of days, as traditional in so many years. However, as they neared the protected area's boundaries, police and armed members of the MOE prohibited them from entering the forest. Tension ensued, with the authorities prevailing over the villagers, repeating accusations that their group was not officially registered and that they were entering a protected area core zone, either of which, they said, made their actions illegal.

From then on until now, the MOE has prevented the villagers from entering the forest for any reason, whether to visit their sacred sites or collect non-timber forest products for their livelihoods. At the same time, however, illegal loggers continue their trade, moving in and out of the forest, cutting down the resin trees that have supported the Kuy people for generations, many being delivered to nearby ELCs, unhampered by the MOE. In a travesty of justice, the villagers who document the loggers are the ones accosted by the MOE for illegal activity, some even imprisoned, accused over and over of not being registered and for entering the core zone. This remains the situation today: unlawful logging by the ELCs, facilitated by the MOE, protected by connected *oknhas*, at the expense of the land and the poor. And yet, the villagers and the Kuy communities continue their vigilance, raising their voices, hoping that equity and justice will come one day.

Some Key Understandings

Over the years, we have witnessed the scenario described above unfold within Cambodian society. As Jesuits who share a mission with our communities, we also struggle to understand the situation and how best to live out the gospel values of caring for the poor and creation. Below are some of our realizations culled from our successes and our mistakes.

- The land and indigenous communities or villagers who have a relationship with the land are one. The flourishing of the land and the fulfilment of those people are aspects of the same phenomenon. Therefore, approaches or interventions should consider both factors at the same time. This is what Pope Francis refers to in *Laudato Si'* when he says, “we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” [par 139]. If the relationship is intact, what benefits one will also benefit the other. Indeed, forest conservation is good for the villagers; empowering the villagers will bear fruit in the preservation of the land. Thus, those who destroy the forest through illegal logging are no longer connected to the land. They have become alienated and disconnected from the land and each other. And their destruction of the land has devastating effects on the people and the environment.
- I think we, the local church in Cambodia, are generally too far removed from the situation mentioned in this article. To begin with, we form part of the market for hardwoods that may well be illegally sourced from protected areas. Because of its quality, church leaders prefer endangered hardwoods for the altar, the church doors, and even the stools or seats for the priests to sit on. We do not seem to connect the wood we prefer to use for liturgical celebrations with the unjust situation against indigenous communities within Cambodian society. On a deeper level, the local church is also cautious in speaking or engaging in activities that may upset the government, even when environmental and social justice matters are at stake. Perhaps we are too afraid.
- Some of us within the Jesuit Mission in Cambodia have partnered with several local communities to try to help in their conservation efforts. For example, we at the Ecology Program worked with members of the Prey Lang Community Network (most of whom are of Kuy descent), supporting their forest patrols, reforestation efforts and tree plantations. We did a forest cover study of Prey Lang and documented the amount of deforestation since 2000. This proved helpful in the overall monitoring of the forest in Prey Lang. The members also asked for training in motorcycle repair and vegetable gardening as added skills to build community capacity and resilience. However, one essential principle before implementing a project is to listen first to the local community, who they are, where they are from, and what they want to do. Too often, good-intentioned outsiders believe they know what is best for the villagers even before asking them, bringing solutions to problems they have not even articulated. In my opinion, the best approach is to play a supporting role to the villagers, to help clarify and amplify their voices, to help build their desired capacities, and to strengthen their relations with one another. In a word, to help them form a stronger local community. And sometimes, even our consistent quiet presence already gives the encouragement that they need.
- Finally, our apostolates, whenever possible, should do what they can to engage and support indigenous communities, especially in light of the different environmental and social crises that all are facing. One of the indigenous people’s central values, essential to the rest of us if we are to survive the future, is their relationship, care and love for the land and nature. If alienation is one of the diseases we suffer from, then love for the land is the cure. Indigenous communities regard the forest not as a commodity with a price tag on it,

to be harvested and profited from, but as an entity which is part of their community. I have heard Kuy people say, “We love the forest as we do ourselves, like family.” And for those who have lived in “more developed” cities, our old ways of thinking and acting will not get us through the crises already beginning to unfold. We must preserve and appropriate the values of those who live close to nature; indeed, they have something valuable to contribute to the rest of us as we collectively face the future.

The ELCs, the *oknhas*, and even some government institutions have stacked the odds against the indigenous communities and their ancestral land. It is undoubtedly an uphill battle. Cultural change will take time, especially for a government with a history like Cambodia. And yet we continue to do what we can, led by the communities who live closest to the land. May we be faithful in our support for their struggle for hope.

Original in English



The First Peoples and Their *Sentir-Pensar*¹, for A New Path of Harmony with the Earth

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Introduction

Technicism understood as one of the pillars of modernity, establishes itself as the basis of rationality advocating empiricism and rational logic to the detriment of other ways of comprehending the world. Capitalism came as a qualifier to this logical perspective, complementing this *modus operandi* with the logic of competition and profit maximization (Parpet, 2006).

Ultimately, this anthropocentric, technical and mercantile system has mass-produced socio-environmental inequalities that jeopardize humanity's very existence on Earth. The situation has long been forewarned by different Indigenous leaders and has more recently been reinforced by the indicators of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate (IPCC) (Krenak, 2020; UN, 2021).

Therefore, the current crisis is a summons to a profound conversion. This article seeks to present Integral Ecology as a promising pathway towards this conversion, especially so that we may listen to the voices of First peoples from all over the world.

Indigenous Knowledge for a New Deal for Civilization

According to the United Nations, Indigenous peoples are “*the guardians of the Earth's precious resources*”. “*Indigenous and tribal peoples and the forests in their ancestral territories play vital roles in global and regional climate action and in fighting poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. Their territories contain about one-third of all the carbon stored in the forests of Latin America and the Caribbean and 14 per cent of the carbon stored in tropical forests worldwide,*” says Julio Berdegue (2021).

It is estimated that there are at least 5,000 Indigenous peoples in the world today, totalling more than 370 million individuals. Latin America is home to 826 Indigenous communities, with some 45 million individuals representing 8.3% of the population (Iwgia, 2015; UN, 2021).

¹ Translator's note: Literally 'Feeling-Thinking'. A living principle based on thinking with both heart and mind – acting without separating mind/body, reason/emotion.

Of course, the plethora of Indigenous populations around the world is of such diversity that it hinders any attempt at generalization; however, it is possible to identify commonalities that demonstrate their awareness of a different paradigm of civilization.

The First peoples' paradigm emerges from the breaking of the divisions between society and nature, between matter and spirit, from the rupture of the linear conceptualization of time; it unseats the human being from the centre of the system, revealing the complexity and consciousness of other non-human organisms that inhabit this planet with us. Of course, these elements, recently accepted by quantum physics (Capra, 1982; Souza, 2020), have been adopted by First peoples for centuries in their way of being and living (Wirá, 1998; Copenawa, 2015; Weir, 2020; Krenak, 2020).

Here the message is urgent: There are many other ways of living on this planet, besides the colonial rationality, that have built much more successful, harmonious, healthy and sustainable relationships with the Earth. They must urgently be heard for the protection of humanity itself!

By observing these customs, we can highlight insights into this paradigm which stems from First peoples and their relationship with the Earth. Let us explore three of them:

- (1) Interdependence, reconnection and relative autonomy (all beings are interconnected and are vitally dependant on one another);
- (2) the consciousness of organic matter (in addition to animals, the plant world is endowed with its own intelligence);
- (3) the circularity of Time (all that exists, pre-exists and coexists, in a chain of transgenerational phenomena interconnecting past, present and future, in a given space. Time is not understood as an arrow, but as a spiral) (Boff, 2015; Mancuso, 2019).

From this inter-relational, organic and circular understanding, most Indigenous peoples develop their dialogue flows. Circularity, observed in the cycles and shapes of Nature, is the basis on which Indigenous peoples build their ways of life.

I have been able to experience this several times with the Marubo peoples, in the far west of the Brazilian Amazon, within the Vale do Javari Indigenous Land. Problem resolution by way of dialoguing is always carried out as a collective. Starting from a cyclical time point previous to now (it would be incorrect to call it the 'past' because what is still occurring in the present has not yet finished), supported by gathering native and ancestral knowledge together. In these talking circles, all speakers refer to how the elements of Nature show signs of approval or disapproval of human behaviour. It is not uncommon that the answer to the question being posed is reflected in the day-to-day behaviour of other animals or plants concerning the particular challenge being discussed.

A similar practice can be observed among various First peoples in North America. When a collective decision must be taken, the Council Fire is convened. To have the right to sit on this council and represent a particular people or group, an individual must have demonstrated that they have led an honest life. More importantly, the individual must be a good listener of

other human beings and other living beings and offer respectful counsel and fair judgment. This way, the space is opened to hear the 'sacred viewpoints' and examine all new prospects.

Each Council convenes a central fire, symbolizing its destiny is also determined by the actions and examples of those who have walked this Earth before us. Thus, the spiritual leaders summon the spirits of the Great Mystery, the creator of the Universe and Mother Earth, ending with the request for blessings to Grandfather Sun and Grandmother Moon.

Then the sequence of dialogues commences within this inter-relational, organic and circular outlook. In this situation, all personal problems are left out of the circle, and any gifts or skills that can help solve the problem are brought inside. A joint resolution is reached by consensus or vote when everyone has presented their ideas.

This practice is often observed during decision-making moments among the Seneca, Aztec, Dakota, Maya, Kiowa, Iroquois and Apache peoples (Sams, 1993). The spirit underpins the 'word' for Indigenous peoples. The 'word' is a life that has taken shape; therefore, its consequences reverberate in the material and non-material world.

"Life is the spirit in motion. The spirit for the Indigenous peoples is silence and sound. When the spirit rings, it gains a tone, a body. It is worth remembering that everything sings: stone, plant, animal, people, earth, sky." (Wará, 2020).

The temporal circularity of the First peoples is a wake-up call to understand that everything is interconnected in this Common Home. A spiritual leader who identifies as a member of the Charrúa ethnic group in southern Brazil once explained that, for his people, the past is not behind but lies ahead; they look to it when they want to understand how to act in a given situation, without repeating previous errors. Time is cyclical and non-linear.

Thus, it is easy to understand how human impacts on Nature reverberate back into ourselves, producing scarcity or abundance, depending on how we act.

We have learned a lot about new ontologies and epistemologies from Indigenous peoples. José Quintero Weir of the Añuu nation, which is in northern Colombia and overlaps with Venezuela, teaches us that the scientific ontology of the Indigenous peoples, described in their mother tongue as Eirare, refers to how we gain an understanding of the 'World-Entity'.

In contrast to the hegemonic approach, which prioritises vision, the Indigenous ontology presents us with another way to understand the world: Ei- represents breathing – the Spirit of the body – located in the heart. In other words, feeling the world with the Spirit of the Heart. Then we have the method of understanding the world called *Corazonar* ('Hearting'): "*to fully Sentir-pensar – or 'feel-think' – in our body, the Sentir-pensar of the body of another*" (Quintero Weir, 2022).

This perspective gives rise to the principle of reciprocity because nothing is exclusively outside; everything is both outside and inside simultaneously, in constant communication. *Corazonar* means being inside the phenomenon, always 'feeling-thinking' from the perspective of another being or how another being affects oneself. This insight is the basis for these

Indigenous peoples' dialogue with the Earth. Therefore, we are not dealing with a cosmovision but a *cosmo-experienciation*.

Finally, for the Añuu peoples, this *cosmo-experience* is directly linked to how we "do" in the territory, thus establishing a territory-rooted experience linked to feeling and acting in the world. Implicit in this perspective is the wisdom of "*walking in the same direction that the World-System walks and never against this flow.*" (Weir, 2020).

The final lesson is that the project of humanity disassociated itself from the Earth, that consequently led to the disintegration of our sense of community, imbues us with a competitive individualism that blocks our true feeling, leading us to think with utilitarian rationality (Weir, 2020).

Thus, through a hegemony of feeling over thought, the First peoples exhibit another relationship with the Earth and show us the vital signs required to establish a different paradigm of civilization. What remains to be seen is: Are we prepared to take this on?

The Importance of Integral Ecology and Socio-Environmental Justice for a New Deal in harmony with the Earth

Integral Ecology, declared by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), does not refer to a specific, closed concept. On the contrary, in a decidedly open and dialogue-based way, it identifies both criticisms and promising practices to build strategies that can overcome our current scenario.

Throughout dialogues and studies carried out by the Integral Ecology Group of the Social Centres Network of the Conference of Provincials of Latin America and the Caribbean, we were able to outline some principles that underpin Integral Ecology without limiting ourselves to a rigid understanding of the concept: the systemic perspective, the multidisciplinary perspective, the transcendental and transgenerational perspective, the ethical perspective and the contextual-cultural perspective (CPAL, 2021).

These perspectives, detailed in the Guidance Framework for Integral Ecology document (2021), precisely result from attentively listening to how these First peoples relate to the Earth and seek to overturn hegemonic values in favour of the Care of Our Common Home.

Bearing that understanding the Integral Ecology of the Latin American and Caribbean reality requires an operative concept (yes, in this instance, conceptual) to be put into practice, we adopt the theory of Socio-Environmental Justice.

Promoting socio-environmental justice is understood to mean "*all those actions that collaborate to overcome the injustices present in our historical heritage and reproduced by the current model of development which generates social inequalities and environmental aggressions.*" (Jesuits Brazil, 2022).

This socio-environmental justice, anchored in the possibility of establishing just relationships with others, with oneself and with Nature, progresses thinking around possible spaces where interventions in favour of Integral Ecology are possible. Some of these include the personal

spaces related to our daily lives, democratic spaces related to public debate, and spaces of knowledge production (Jesuits Brazil, 2022).

Obviously, these areas guide us towards a more just relationship with the Earth and the First peoples. We have developed several initiatives from these justice perspectives, such as the Rights of Nature under the umbrella of Integral Ecology.

What distinguishes the Rights of Nature is that it is an integral movement that joins the academic, technical and social spheres together to claim that Nature, like human beings, is subject to rights.

This issue emerged in Latin America due to the centuries-old struggle led by Indigenous peoples in the Andes and the Amazon Basin. As a strategic measure against the colonial model, they agreed to promote the political-conceptual convergence of ancestral practices and knowledge related to their relationship with the Earth under the banner of *Buen Vivir* (Acosta, 2016; Lacerda, 2021; Guatarri, 1995; Leff, 2014).

Currently, in line with the United Nations Harmony with Nature Program, we have brought together inter-institutional initiatives, social movements and Indigenous peoples by establishing the National Coordination for the Rights of Nature - Mother Earth in Brazil.

Final Considerations

We are in the process of a tremendous civilizational rupture that indicates the exhaustion of the Earth's capacity to self-regulate caused by human activities.

We must negotiate a new deal in the relationship with our environment and with the other beings who coexist alongside us. Numerous methodological and conceptual tools signal the pathway forward, including the paradigmatic perspective offered by Integral Ecology, socio-environmental justice and their summons to all humanity to form a new learning alliance with First peoples.

To achieve this, we need to launch a deep process to redress the socio-environmental injustices that have at least shaped our society for the last three centuries. This socio-environmental justice is centred on ensuring spaces where those who have been invisible throughout history can give voice to their cries and teachings. Thus, the First and traditional peoples, among them the Indigenous peoples, can echo the cry of the Earth and teach us another way to relate to it through *Sentir-pensar*.

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Migration for Livelihood: Loss of Land and Reduced Land Produce

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In one of the Round Table Conferences for Joint Diploma in Integral Ecology, a student from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) made a heartening and thought-provoking observation on the call of Pope Francis “to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (*Laudato si'*, §49). Commenting on the call of Pope Francis, he remarked, “We talk aloud about the *cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*. But we seem to plug our ears to avoid listening to the cry arising from the land of Africa, which is crying for long, and we seem to ignore the loud cries and wails of the people of Africa. Our land is on sale in the international market. Our riches are being looted, and our people are forced to work for those merchants and plunderers. Who will listen to the cry of our people and our land?” His observations echo the desperation, exhaustion and helplessness of the indigenous Indians and those forced to live on the peripheries of fast-expanding cities after losing their land and livelihood. In the name of development with the camouflaged duping slogans such as “*Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas*” (Collective Efforts, Inclusive Growth), they are being evicted from their land with no guarantee of resettlement or with a minimum or no compensation at all and being forced to migrate to cities for a livelihood without any proper socio-economic security.

The observations of the Joint Diploma student from the Democratic Republic of Congo duplicate the experiences of a group of *Adivasi* (indigenous) people from a remote area of Jharkhand (India) in 1998. They were forced to leave their home and take shelter in the forest to avoid unceremonious arrests by the local Police. Two men from the nearby small town had tried to abduct a tribal girl child; they were caught red-handed and badly thrashed by the villagers. As it often happens, being unaware of the legal proceedings, they did not complain about the incident to the local Police, who, acting on the First Information Report filed by the abductors, started rounding up the villagers. The villagers fled to the forest to avoid being arrested falsely. They stayed in the forest for weeks leaving behind everything unattended and giving rise to a sad song coming out of their hearts. “Without us, our land is crying for us; our crops are being destroyed; our cattle are in tears for our care; our life and livelihood are at stake; how long shall we cry in exile; who will listen to our cry of agony and misery!” Their desperate cry resounds the paramount importance of the five J’s in the life of the *Adivasi* (indigenous) people – *Jan, Janwar, Jameen, Jal* and *Jungle* (people, cattle, land, water and forest).

All five J's are the foundations of their life, livelihood and existence for the indigenous communities. They play a vital role in defining their identity, worldview, way of life, socio-cultural, religious values, ethical values, practices, customs and traditions. However, without *Jameen* (land), all the other J's have no existential meaning. *Jameen* (land) remains their life-blood, source of life, livelihood, and sustenance. From the early history of indigenous people, the settlement of a group of indigenous people in a particular land has resulted in the formation of villages, clans, families and communities, and the establishment of relationships. The type of land and the surrounding ambience helped a particular community settle down there for an extended period or eventually forced them to move out in search of more favourable land for the flourishing of life, evidenced by the abundance of cattle, crops, and progeny. The same trend continues even today on different levels and in various forms. The loss of land, and the decreasing productivity of land or less land, force them to migrate to the cities for a better livelihood.

The question arises, "What does the loss of land or the reduced produce of land mean in terms of the Adivasi life and livelihood?" Even today, more than half of the *Adivasis* depend on agriculture for their living, apart from whatever seasonal edible fruits, flowers and roots they can get from the jungle. Because of the lack of proper irrigation facilities, their agricultural activities primarily depend on the monsoon. Over the recent years, the erratic monsoon, gradual deterioration and degradation of cultivable land, shrinking water resources, and insufficient agricultural produce have caused havoc in their lives. Apart from that, the inappropriate and inadequate use of arable land adds woes to their poverty and misery. Cultivation of the same crop year after year in the same field destroys the productivity of the land. Another factor, which affects the productivity of arable land, is the continuous and excessive use of chemicals, fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides. Of course, in some areas, apart from growing the traditional food sources such as paddy, wheat, corn, pearl millet, broomcorn millet, sorghum, etc., they have gradually learned to produce a variety of vegetables and cash crops throughout the whole year. However, the remote Adivasi areas do not have the chain of the demand-supply market system to sell their agricultural products; hence, the small-scale farmers lack the incentive or desire to opt for a cash crop. Their land remains unused except for the paddy season.

Along with the field's produce, they also depend on the forests for their livelihood. They collect a variety of edible flowers, fruits, leaves, roots and mushrooms almost every season. However, in recent years, forest officials have outlined various restrictions to prevent them from using the forest produce to save the forests. In some areas, either tunnels have been dug, or barbed-wire fences have been erected to prevent cattle from entering the forest area for grazing. With these two significant sources of livelihood, land and forest, gradually drying up, they are forced to migrate to the cities to work as housemaids or unskilled labourers in mills, factories or construction sites or work in the agricultural fields of other States, such as Punjab and Haryana. The rural setup offers almost negligible possibilities for creative work or job opportunities for the young Adivasi boys and girls. After working the whole morning at home or in the field, many Adivasi men and women flock to the cities and wait along the roadside to be hired for different menial labour, even for a meagre wage. Such pitiful scenes represent the parable told by Jesus, "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went

out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard” (Mt 20:1-2). The construction companies or some affluent families come to hire them for a day and pay as minimum as possible since there is no government-mandated minimum wage. Not all are hired for work. Some remain there until the end of the day and return home empty-handed. Because rampant corruption and nepotism play a significant role in bringing unskilled labourers from outside Jharkhand State, leaving aside the Adivasi people of the State, many remain “excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §53) to fend for themselves. Living in such a desperate situation, if someone offers the possibility “to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance” (*Populorum Progressio* §1), they do not hesitate to jump into the abyss of uncertainties and challenges. The prospect of earning money on their own and helping their families pulls them to the cities, while misery, poverty, and hopelessness act as push factors for the migration.

After migration to the cities in the hope of a better life, *Adivasis* often find their dreams shattered. Typically, the male folk are employed in labour-intensive works such as cleaning, driving, housekeeping, or as manual labourers on construction sites. In contrast, the Adivasi women are employed as maidservants in houses for sweeping, cleaning, swabbing, washing clothes and dishes, cooking or looking after the children. Despite all this work, their living and working conditions are pathetic, with no limits on working hours, no respect for their work, and no protection or social security from physical, mental, and sexual exploitations. Without any formal contract, they live under constant fear of being thrown out of work at any point in time. Even if they succeed in sending some financial assistance to their respective families, their feeling of being away from their homeland tortures and traumatises them. In any meeting or interaction with them, their incredible sense of sadness, pain, apathy and humiliation bursts out, mainly at the fact of not being treated as equal human beings by their employers and the city dwellers. The torture is more incredible when they see the luxurious lives led by their employers. Unfortunately for newcomers, the derogatory terms used and the negative attitudes shown towards them by their Adivasi community members settled in the cities are even more painful and unbearable. Their experiences raise some serious ethical and theological questions regarding the concept of a human being, respect, dignity, and the role of faith in instilling those values in their life. Is migration an answer to their plight, caused by the loss of their land or the reduced productivity of land? Can the plight of the Adivasi people and the outsourcing of their talents, creativity, and tremendous energy, to live the lives of enslaved people be justified in the name of survival and subsistence? Can their workforce not be used instead to transform their own land?

The above-mentioned intriguing questions have been tormenting Adivasi communities for a long time. The efforts to stop the migration caused by the insensitiveness of the local people and the civic bodies have not yielded satisfactory results. The biggest problem is rural areas’ lack of incentives or job opportunities. Undoubtedly, the Government of Jharkhand has been offering some incentives, such as Self-entrepreneurship Projects, Training Programs for Farming and Fisheries, and financial assistance to start small-scale businesses. There are also job opportunities in rural areas through the construction of roads, bridges, wells, and ponds. Still, rampant corruption, misconduct, and nepotism eat up more than half of the resources

meant for the projects, thus perpetuating the local population's poverty and misery. For many, migration seems to be the only answer for the moment because the light of hope at the end of the dark tunnel of despair and uncertain future is still very dim. No doubt, the people in the cities would not like to forego the luxury of cheap labourers to do their daily chores from making beds, cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, and child care in the middle of the night. But at what cost? Migrating to the cities in search of a better life and future: Is it at the expense of their life, fundamental human rights and dignity trampled under the feet, or by listening to both *the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*?

Original in English



My Resilience and Struggle to Save our Innu Land and Culture

Tshaukuesh Elizabeth Penashue

Sheshatshiu, Labrador, Canada

I come from a long line of family resilience, struggles and strength. Our ancestors were hard-working people and endured a lot. They probably thought this land would be untouched and forever beautiful and full of life. They wanted us to continue the journey of protecting the land and living off the land. Our ancestors did not think our land would be destroyed or polluted by newcomers. They wanted our land protected because it was so important. I want to continue that journey. This is where my strength comes from: **my people**. The women stood up to fight for our land. We got together and supported each other. We made each other stronger.

Our land is so important. Our ancestors were strong and healthy, and their children were healthy. They were hunters and learned to survive off the land, and we respected everything that came from the land and the water.

We first heard the cries of the land when the government went ahead and built the Churchill Falls Hydro dam. Our people were distraught and felt helpless. The government was destroying and flooding the land. The flooding inundated our family's burial grounds. Our hunting territories were destroyed. We always hunted; that was our way of life. But the more the damage was done, the stronger we became. Many Innu people have sacred places on our land. They remember the places they travelled and hunted. They remember where their ancestors were born and buried. Everything and everyone are connected. All the camping grounds and family gatherings were so crucial to our people. After the flooding by the dam, the Innu were sent to collect the bones of our ancestors. They found some bones and reburied them in our homeland. Many gravesites were never found. Many Innu people were hurt and disrespected that must never happen again.

I was very concerned when they started developing the mine at Voisey's Bay years ago. I invited one of the administrators to visit me. We sat down together to talk. I spoke slowly to make sure he understood me. I said, "You're here to run this company. You're not from Labrador. You're from outside, but you're doing this on and to our land. You'll work here for a few years, and then you'll retire and return from where you came. But what about what you're going to do to our land? We'll still be here; our children and future generations will be

here hunting.” I asked him if he understood what I said. He replied, “Yes, I understand, and I can’t give you an answer. You’re right.”

I think about this a lot. I think about Voisey’s Bay, Churchill Falls, Muskrat Falls, and Gull Island. It’s always the same. They build these projects, go home, and don’t have to think about what they’ve done to our land. This breaks my heart.

It is very hurtful that the government representatives speak to the Innu Nation, Band Council, and businesspeople. They tell them these developments will be suitable for the Innu. They say we’ll have good jobs and money to buy things like Skidoos, nice houses, and things for our children. They say our children will make lots of money. Then they destroy the land to build mines and dams. Innu people get jobs, but they are dirty low-level jobs—peeling potatoes, shovelling, scrubbing floors, cleaning rooms—while the intruding white people get excellent clean jobs in offices. The managers say that’s because they went to university and our people didn’t.

The Innus are told that they shouldn’t tell anyone about the abusive working conditions or they will lose their jobs. I heard on Innu radio that our people are not even allowed to hunt or fish, as they had done for centuries. So, they can’t send food home to their families, their grandparents. It is our tradition to hunt and fish and share the food. This is especially important to us. I want to do so much and continue teaching our people our way of life. However, I feel there is so much interruption and destruction on our land.

The government has destroyed our way of life. Our ancestors had a healthy and untouched land. Their food and survival tools were all there. They had the animals, land, and rivers to continue living off the land. Our ancestors were able to feed their families and protect the environment by hunting while respecting the animals and land. Our past gives me strength and inspires me to continue to teach their Innu way of life, their teachings and hunting skills. But the government has taken away my teaching tools, exploiting the land and destroying all the animals. If we don’t have these, we won’t be able to continue our traditions. I want to use my teaching skills to bequeath the Innu way of life to my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But the Churchill River is being flooded again with more hydro dams at Muskrat Falls and Gull Island. I feel deeply distressed that I can no longer use it to canoe and teach children.

We have lost the best piece of ourselves when we cannot pass down our knowledge. I would like to see our way of life carried on for all our future generations. In the past, Innu people spent much of their time on the land and in the wild. The ancients passed on much knowledge about animals and plants; they never forgot where they came from and their way of life. They only went to the village from time to time to replenish supplies. The women cared for their children and hunted small game animals like partridge, rabbit, and fish. Women were very good at that way of life back then. Children helped their parents too. Elders and children had a lot of respect for the Innu land. People did not need much, and Elders kept the few things required for their way of life in a safe place.

Today, our land is being killed along with our rivers, plants, birds, and animals. The government, for industrial gain, is still polluting our water and destroying the Innu way of life. It's as though our children and we are not even here. No tribe will be here soon on our land, and it will not have cared for the way we used to care for it. I and some other Innu will continue to fight for our land so our future generations can benefit from it. It's time for the government to leave our land alone and stop making the Innu suffer in their own country. There has been too much destruction of our land. It's time the government starts listening to the Innu. We have suffered so much. We care a lot about our land. We have been here for many centuries.

The Innu have been mistreated for a very long time: for example, the buried remains of Innu children found in government residential schools. The purpose of these schools is to root out our language and culture. Today our people are dying in hospitals of diabetes, heart disease and other illnesses we never suffered from in our old way of life. This hurts many Innu. It's time to stop mistreating the Innu, Inuit, coloured and Black peoples. This has gone on for too long. We are like a tree, and a tree has many roots. A tree can live for a long time if protected and cared for, just like our people's lives.

You have killed many trees by taking away the roots. You have killed many Innu people by destroying their land, water, hunting and survival. We all want to live happy and healthy lives like the land. It wants to be healthy. Same with the animals. They want good and healthy lives. I feel like the animals talk to me when I am out on the land. Sometimes I wrap my arms around a tree and ask for strength. I ask the trees for help to continue my journey in protecting the land. Sometimes I see a partridge and hear them telling me, "This is where we are. This is where we come from. This is how we survive. We drink and eat here."

Before I leave, I hear their last statement, "Don't give up, Elizabeth. Keep protecting the land." I wave and tell the animals I'll be back. They give me so much strength and spiritual power. I know animals do not verbally talk, but I can understand and relate to them. We respect animals and land.

Original in English



Broken Covenants: Can Tribals Trust the Mining Companies, the Judiciary and the Government?

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March 2, 2015: It was 2.30 pm. As a research scholar, I reached a remote tribal village called Singdhari, in Pakur district, Jharkhand, central India, with around 75 Santhal tribal families. I went there with five University students from Dumka town, belonging to the same Santhal tribal community, and five other local village leaders. I went there to initiate a research study on the impact of coal mining in nine coal mine-affected tribal villages, including Singdhari.

The entire village was already waiting under a big banyan tree since Mr Manjhi Tudu, the village head (*manjhigadam*), had already informed them of my visit and study. Mr Tudu introduced and welcomed us in a typical tribal way and invited me to explain the study to the villagers. Generally, tribals do not make decisions with a simple majority. They make decisions with the approval of every person in the village. Even if one person has difficulty, everyone would listen to his opinion and explain it to him. Time is secondary to the individual's free opinion and acceptance. What is vital for the tribals is that everyone must approve and must feel comfortable. Therefore, I had to explain the study's purpose, process and outcome to the entire village. I had to answer all their questions and doubts and receive their approval. With the help of my investigators, I began explaining. Everyone attentively listened with great eagerness. As I proceeded with my explanation, I noticed ten young boys arriving on motorcycles. With the sound of the motorcycles, I sensed some disturbing movements and murmurs among the gathered villagers.

The young boys had arrived from another mine-affected village called, Alubera. They stood there listening to me for less than five minutes and then began raising their voices, abusing and accusing me of being an agent of the Mining Company. Even not knowing who they were, I tried explaining to them that I was a researcher since I had nothing to hide. However, my reasoning was snubbed since they were drunk and were determined not to allow the meeting to continue. They threatened me with dire consequences if I did not leave the village immediately. Although the village leaders tried to explain to the youth, they refused to listen. The village leaders who invited me to make this study later informed me that although the youth pretended to be against the Mining Company, they were the company's proxies. A few Santhal beneficiaries and supporters of the Mining Company from Alubera village, allegedly involved in many corrupt and criminal activities, including the murder of some opposing

leaders, with the help of the Mining Company, had actually sent the young boys to stop any kind of study that might expose the truth.

I returned to Dumka after my first failed attempt but was fully convinced about the need for my work and was determined to find a suitable time and a way to enter the villages again. I was disturbed to find a deep divide among the villagers who had once created a solid united resistance. In this volatile situation, I had to find other ways to begin the study. After several rounds of quiet discussions with the leaders of one of the villages called Kathaldih and three village meetings to explain the study, all done discreetly, I finally entered the New Kathaldih Colony inconspicuously on 12th July, 2015. Kathaldih was the first village, with 71 families, to lose its 401.33 acres of land and agriculture for mining. The people were living in a resettlement colony, and I stayed with them for a few days and completed the survey with the help of Santhal student investigators.

After completing the first level of data collection, I temporarily bid farewell and left the colony to return to Dumka. Suddenly, as I got onto the main road along with the investigators, around 25 to 30 armed men stopped and surrounded our vehicle. I saw at least six of those who had threatened me on my first entry into Singdhari village in March 2015. They were angry and upset, tried to pull me out of the vehicle forcefully and threatened to kill me. They were violent as they were worried that the truth about their alleged involvement in the murder of the leader of the anti-mining movement, Sr. Valsa John, on November 15, 2011, and many other criminal activities of the Company might be revealed and that some of them might be convicted by the Indian court. Hence, their fear was understandable. They were determined to take away all the filled-in survey forms and destroy them to conceal the truth. Nonetheless, I remained calm and serene but resolute not to give away the survey forms and break the confidentiality and trust of the people, putting their lives at risk. Luckily, thanks to good contacts that I had established with the local and state administration before entering the village, and quick communication with them from the spot of the incident, I escaped unharmed without giving away any of the filled forms.

A Tragic Story Behind Tribal Disunity and Division due to Coal Mining:

Kathaldih is a Santhal Adivasi village in Amrapara block, Pakur district, Jharkhand, India. The indigenous Adivasi people had lived in harmony with their *jal*, *jangal*, and *jamin* (water, forest and land) for centuries. They took care of mother earth, and she took care of them. There was a self-sufficient agricultural economy, enjoying the fruits of their agriculture and forests. Their land gave them identity. Their socio-cultural values reflected an equalitarian community based on equality, cooperation, and consensus decision-making. But this harmonious life was abruptly cut short by the State's decision to give their land to a Mining Company without their free, prior and informed consent.

Pachwara Coal Mine Project: A Case Study

In 2001, the Ministry of Coal allocated Pachwara Central Block, around 13 sq. km for captive mining, to Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB), which entered into a Joint Venture (JV) with Eastern Minerals Trading Agency (EMTA), a Company with its headquarters in Kolkata, to

form PANEM Coal Mines Limited (PCML) for the purpose of mining coal in the Pachwara Central block.

The Santhals, Paharias, Dalits and other tribals from these nine affected villages in Pachwara central block came together and decided to resist the forcible takeover of their land. They mobilized and organized themselves into a people's movement called *Rajmahal Pahad Bachao Andolan* (RPBA), which means *Save the Rajmahal Hills Movement*. The villagers put up a stiff resistance, built a barricade and prevented outsiders, including the district administration, from entering the village. They held regular meetings, organized blockades, rallies, and protests and collectively expressed their resolve not to give their land to a private mining company. They faced violence, intrusion, allegations and innumerable police and legal cases against the leaders. It was indeed a successful people's movement for six years.

Reasons for the Divide among the Tribals:

However, in collaboration with the administration, the Mining Company adopted the classic divide and conquer method. They used a) inducement, b) co-optation, and c) repression. It co-opted a few gullible and greedy villagers, alluring them with material favours like motorcycles, petty contracts, liquor, and remuneration. It 'bought off' leaders of political parties and the media. In connivance with the local administration, the Company also began using repressive measures of threats, violence, false cases against leaders, illegal detentions, arrests, imprisonment and harassment of people in public places and even a few murders, though projected as accidents.

Seeing the division among the people, the movement leaders appealed to the Jharkhand High Court, basing their argument mainly on the *Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (1949)*, which prohibits the transfer of Santhal tribal land to any non-tribal, let alone to a private Company. But neither the state government listened to their demand nor did the High Court pay any heed to their appeal. When they approached the Supreme Court, it refused to look into the case. Still, it ordered PANEM Co. to sit with people's movement and work out a mutually acceptable Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The movement was compelled to enter into an agreement with the Company, which was done on November 30, 2006. The agreement between the Company and the movement was a unique one, a first of its kind, with some excellent features that showed signs of a positive way of mining without denying the rights and dignity of the tribals as land owners. A few salient clauses of this legally signed MoU between the movement and the Director of the Company, with the knowledge of the Supreme Court, include:

- That the land acquisition is for the limited purpose of excavation of coal and the tribal people are the absolute owners of the land;
- 50% of the land must be returned to the original landowners in cultivable condition after refilling the mine with good soil;
- Compensation for land and crops;
- Provide 210 sq. meters of homestead land and construct a house with a plan akin to the customary houses, with drinking water, electricity (24 hrs) and a toilet

- Establishment of *Manjhisthan* (traditional village meeting place), playground, pond, place of worship, grazing land, cremation ground, a market place for the village
- Employment for one person in each family and
- Construction of schools, hospitals and village infrastructure, etc.

The tribals, innocent as they were, trusted and believed in the agreement. They were too naive to understand the sugar-coated trap set by the Company with the administration's support. They thought their misery would end, their children's lives would be better, and they would get back their land. However, this was not the plan of the Mining Company, and they were only interested in starting the mining by any means.

Late Father Stan Swamy, whom I interviewed as part of my research study, said on 9th December 2015,

“The test of the MoU is in its fulfilment of promises. The companies are there for profit, and that is their top priority. If they do anything for the people whose land they are using, it is more out of compulsion than genuine concern for the people's welfare. They will always find loopholes to get out of the commitments and make more profit. If any other people's movement in the future wishes to go for an MoU, it would be to its detriment unless proper safeguards are taken.”

Almost proving the above prophetic words of Father Stan Swamy, PANEM Co. fulfilled partially only 6 of the 41 promises they made in the MoU. Kathaldih village had 86 families, all of whom were displaced in 2007 and 71 resettled in New Kathaldih Colony. They were provided with a house each in a colony, but not in the style promised to the *Adivasis*. Around 30 houses remain submerged for almost five months in a year due to waterlogging since they were built on agricultural land next to the river Basloi. Electricity was provided only for 12 hours at night till July 2015, when PANEM stopped mining since it was also one of the Mining Companies that were considered illegal by the SC in 2015. An overhead water tank was constructed, but no drinking water was ever supplied anywhere in the village from the tank. Common bathing water facilities were given, but that too stopped in July 2015. No toilet was ever constructed for any of the families. None of the families was cultivating since all their land was taken, and the co. has not restored the land to them after the mining was done.

Regarding employment and income, eight families out of 71 interviewed did not get any job in the Company. Fifty-three families (74.7%) received a salary of Rs. 6,000 – 6,999 per month (US \$ 79 – 92). Unfortunately, ever since March 2015, when the mining was stopped due to a Supreme Court order, even those people have not received any salary. The people of Kathaldih neither have their agricultural land nor any salary from the Company on which they depended entirely for their living. This has caused much anxiety and poverty among the people. At least other villages have agricultural land, but the people of Kathaldih have neither the land nor any income for survival.

Impact of Mining and MoU on Land, Tribal Life and their Culture:

All the 71 families who live in New Kathaldih Colony lost their original houses and agricultural land in 2006. In 2007 they were relocated to the Colony, and since then, they have

lived at the mercy of the Mining Company. Along with the land, they lost their entire way of life, livelihood, human dignity, and their symbiotic relationship with nature and other tribals.

Through my research study, I examined the socio-economic status of these families, such as their education, health, employment, land and agriculture, before and after the start of mining. The health and employment standards improved initially to some extent but became worse with the increase in pollution. They lost their employment in 2015 when the mining stopped. Issues related to education, land and agriculture deteriorated far beyond anyone's imagination. Cultivation became impossible due to coal dust that covered the entire land.

For any tribal person, tribal culture gives the fundamental identity and dignity one receives from one's community. When asked about the impact of mining and the MoU, everyone in the colony expressed that their traditional tribal way of life and culture had been greatly affected. Padel (2009, p.331) says, "The very act of mining a mountain violates the order of life which tribal culture has preserved and lived harmoniously with since history began. There is a clash of belief systems here more fundamental than the conflict between religions."

They said that their cultural activities and respect for the elders have decreased, and competitiveness and self-centredness have increased. Some elders voiced their opinion that the youth today are more interested in film music and dances than Santhal cultural songs and dances. Vinay Kumar, one of the movement activists (interviewed on 22nd Sept. 2015), painfully narrated a few incidents of sexual abuse of young Santhal girls in the villages due to the significant presence of non-tribals in the area. He attributed this to the entry of mining and the MoU. He said, "naturally, a sudden influx of easy money tempts the youngsters to extravagance. They want to show off before others, and they feel that it gives them a modern identity, and as a result, our culture and lifestyle are deteriorating drastically."

Cernea (2000, p. 3666), speaking about what happens to a community when it is displaced or relocated, says,

Forced displacement tears apart the existing social fabric. It disperses and fragments communities, dismantles patterns of social organisation and interpersonal ties; kinship groups become scattered as well. Life-sustaining informal networks of reciprocal help, local voluntary associations, and self-organised mutual service are disrupted. This is a net loss of valuable 'social capital' that compounds the loss of natural, physical, and human capital. The social capital lost through social disarticulation is typically unperceived and uncompensated by the programmes causing it, and this real loss has long-term consequences.

The people of Kathaldih village, relocated to the Colony in 2007, have been living like refugees there for the past 15 years. They still hope to return to their 'homeland' and rebuild their life, livelihood and culture.

Isn't this the result of Tribals Trusting the Mining Companies, the Judiciary and the Government?

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Original in English



Spiritually Rediscovering the Land: A Personal Journey

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Indigenous people's spiritual relationships with the land helped turn our committee into a sacred circle.

I do not fully understand what I have just written. But I believe it is true, and I also believe that it is part of what I am learning from Indigenous people about the place of the land and Creation in my relationship with Jesus Christ.

From 2020 to 2021, a small group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Catholics in Canada explored Indigenous spiritual relationships with the land and how the land is a fundamental part of Indigenous relations with the Creator. I was honoured to be part of this group, along with six others. We were working for the *Episcopal Commission for Christian Unity, Religious Relations with the Jews, and Interreligious Dialogue* of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Our task was to collaborate with other related subcommittees to prepare a document or other teaching tool that could help ordinary Catholics in Canada appreciate Indigenous spiritualities, whether they were Christian or Traditional Indigenous spiritualities.

In our group of seven people, three were Indigenous, and four were non-Indigenous or, as we now say in Canada, four were settlers or of settler origin. Settler means colonizer or descended from colonizers or benefitting from colonization. The Indigenous members were all Anishinabe, so our collective lived experience included only the spiritualities of the Anishinabe Nations. Everyone was Catholic with solid spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formations. Many members of the group had worked together before. Even so, we encountered challenges of trust and understanding.

Our group began life as a subcommittee of the episcopal commission I mentioned earlier and ended as a sacred circle. This was not the only transformation we experienced but was related to Indigenous relationships with the land. I want to share with the readers of *Promotio Iustitiae* some of what I learned by working in this group and how I have been affected by it.

Let me start with one learning. It emerged from sharing my own relationship to the land and listening carefully to what others were saying about their relationships. I grew up in a very small town in eastern Canada, next to the forest. Even though my father sometimes needed a cane to walk safely, he would often take me for walks in the forest on weekends. My mother grew up on a nearby farm and told me many stories of her life there. I love the forest and the

wilderness. I feel at home there and miss it when I am not near it. I find God in nature and have experienced the risen and transformed humanity of Jesus there. When I am exhausted, I often have a recurring dream of being cared for by wild animals in the forest, and I wake up feeling refreshed.

Despite such experiences, my participation in our group showed me that the spiritual relationships of my Indigenous colleagues to the land were not only different from mine but also more different than I had suspected. I did not even understand their relationships. For example, one of the Indigenous people told a story of meeting an Indigenous man who pointed to a part of the forest and said something like, "Every tree here knows me personally." I understand every word in that sentence but do not really understand its message. Nevertheless, I respect what I hear and see it as genuine and legitimate, even if I do not fully understand it.

This and other differences in understanding the land and relating to it did not emerge early in our group's process. Before we reached that level of intimacy, we first had to go through some other transformations to deepen our trust and connectedness with each other.

One of those transformations was in our way of proceeding. Our group began to work in a typical western organizational style. The archbishop was the chair; we had an agenda, minutes, a schedule, and the suggestion of a deadline for "results". A staff person from the episcopal conference kept the business moving. After a while, we seemed to be getting stuck. I will not go into the details of how and why we got stuck, but we became unstuck by addressing each person's fears and discomforts, by taking our time and forgetting about deadlines, and by "deposing" the archbishop as chair (he didn't mind) and replacing him with co-chairs who were himself and an Indigenous member and making sure that only Indigenous people led Indigenous ceremonies. The staff person was treated as a member of the group. Formally, we were still a subcommittee. Practically, however, we were now a sacred circle and a faith community. Only at this point could we start sharing how we related to the land, including how we related to our bodies. The sacred circle was the safe space where we could share the intimacy of our relationships with the land, physical reality, and God.

Part of what made the space safe was that it was also spiritual. We would begin each meeting with a prayer that would include an Indigenous ceremony called a smudge. Sacred medicinal plants - often a combination of tobacco, sage, sweet grass and cedar - would be burned, and the fragrant smoke would be waved over each participant to help him, or her replace negative feelings with positive ones to receive with generosity and freedom whatever would be offered by God and by the others in the meeting. The smudge helped us move from ordinary time and space to sacred time and space. This sacred time and space helped us build trust and transparency, which in turn enabled us to reach the physical, emotional and spiritual depths of our relationships with the land and our own createdness.

We had wanted to meet on the land. Communion with each other on the land and harmony with the land would have enriched our process by building a shared relationship with the land for our group. Guidance from Indigenous Elders also would have helped. Sadly, Covid precautions prevented both forms of contact. We partially compensated for these lacks,

utilizing Indigenous ceremonies. One Indigenous person observed that the simple physical ingredients and gestures of Indigenous ceremonies made them very human and easy to understand, no matter their religious tradition. So, we built our sacred circle's shared relationship with the land through the ceremony. This was a way of reverencing the land, each other, and the Creator.

Getting to a shared, safe interior space where we felt free to share our relationships with the land was not easy. This was not an academic or an intellectual exercise. Our topic was the land in Indigenous spiritualities; we did not go outside for information or learn works to get there. Instead, we went within. Our experience was our data. We ourselves, our experiences and our relationships were the object of our investigations. While our process was not academic, it was nevertheless a rigorous affective, intellectual and spiritual exercise. We could not have accessed the places of our relationships with the land without processes of reconciliation among us, which included reconciliation between Indigenous and settler people and ways of knowing.

That reaching a common place where we could share our various relationships with the land was so much work, and that the work involved reconciliation was a huge surprise to me. I felt the surprise before I understood it. Indeed, I am only starting to understand it now that I am writing about it! The unexpected effort and that we had to be intentional in how we used our own subjectivities in the process suggested that my relationship with the land was much more significant than I had thought. I began to suspect that the land, Creation itself, is more than a context for human activity or even for salvation; it is more than a cypher pointing to the divine. The animals, the plants, the stones, and the stars all have value in themselves.

I have been able to say such a thing – things have value in themselves - as a philosophical and theological point for years. But it is only now, through my relations with Indigenous people and how my relations are shaking me with Indigenous people, that I am beginning to understand what this might mean. Only now is it starting to have spiritual meaning for me.

I always talk to cats, dogs, and plants, but I do not expect them to talk back to me. I hope to learn something from them, but I do not expect them to have something that they might somehow want to teach me. So, I do not really listen to them. I am starting to learn that the land, Creation, is not “out there”. It is not a “they” or a “them”. It is a “we”. When I “look at” the land, I no longer look outside myself or downwards to something lesser. I am looking from within and horizontally. When some of my Indigenous friends say something like “I am the land” or “this land and I are one”, or “our identity is bound up with the land”, or “the animals are my brothers and sisters”, I am starting to understand, even if I know I do not fully understand. But I do know that I feel better when I think these new thoughts. I feel less being the centre of things. I feel more attentive, more grateful, and more generous. I feel consoled.

After many months of working and growing together, our group has experienced the transformative power of Indigenous spiritual relationships to the land and land-based relationships with God. Working in this circle has stimulated much theological reflection and sent me more deeply into my Christian roots. I have a stronger feeling for the sacredness of all living things, the earth, and their value in themselves. I have a stronger sense of the mystery

of unity that underlies and connects all of Creation, and I feel more strongly part of that unity and support within it. I think more often of God as Creator than before because I was more used to thinking of God as Saviour. Thinking of God as a Saviour puts a particular emphasis on me as one who needs saving. While this remains very important for me, I feel more decentered by a stronger appreciation of God as Creator and of Creation having a value in itself. Finally, the more we discussed Indigenous spirituality and ceremony, the more sacred the earth became and the more earthy the divine became for me. This gave me a sharper feeling for the Incarnation and the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. He went to the Father with his transformed humanity and body, which began to exalt all of Creation with Him.

It seems that transformations like those I have been experiencing might help us live better in the constitutive place of Creation in our relationships with God. The General Congregation (GC) 35 called us to each other and the kind of integral ecological conversion that Pope Francis called us to in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. If so, I believe we need the help of Indigenous spiritualities to do so. Perhaps Indigenous spiritualities can help the Church in the same way that they have helped me.

Original in English



Reflections on the Last Farmers in the Polderland

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“The cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor!” Pope Francis coined this expression in his encyclical “Laudato Si” (LS §49, §246). This metaphor - earth crying out in pain caused by our mistreatment of it - is at first unusual, haunting and at the same time disturbing. It is linked to the thinking that is still common to many people, especially in the Global South: the earth is a complex living organism that includes everything that lives on and from it - plants and animals, including humans. This thinking is not just magical but reflects a reality that is also scientifically based: the land/soil is not a dead substance but animated by myriads of organisms. Their behaviour towards the earth is symbiotic. Of course, they also intervene in nature and influence it respectfully and moderately. It happens in the awareness that another life needs to be taken for their own survival: an animal that is slaughtered and eaten, a tree that is felled and worked on. Their lives are determined by a spirituality that still knows about creation, the gift character of all that is, and the origin of what has been created. This spirituality knows that “everything is connected to everything else and is dependent on each other”.

We mockingly laugh at people as “tree-huggers” who apologise to a tree before chopping it down, who seem not to know any better and still believe in spirits. What this shows, however, is our lack of understanding of the diversity of nature. Since the beginning of so-called modernity, we humans of the Global North, or rather in the western world, have taken ourselves out of nature and think we have made it “subject/subjugated to us” and an object for our actions. The complex living being “earth” is considered a dead matter that humans work on, manipulate as they please and ruthlessly exploit. At the same time, we have lost the ability to live in harmony with nature. We have forgotten to hear its voice, feel its rhythm, and live according to it. We have become deaf to the lamentations of the earth and the call for justice for those who suffer from our behaviour.

At the same time, I ask myself: isn't this division into “good South” and “bad North” alluded to above too simplistic and too woodcut-like? Is the reality of the differences not more complex and challenging than this “North-South” scheme suggests? We often attribute the way of life described above, the knowledge of the created-ness of the earth and action derived from it to the “indigenous peoples”. We often have an approximate idea of “indigenous peoples” and almost automatically place them outside Europe (and then think of Amazonia, the “Native people” in the USA or Canada, the aborigines of Australia or the peoples in Papua

New Guinea). But who would be the indigenous people in Europe? Only people like the Sámi in northern Scandinavia? Or should we also include the original farming population in many parts of our continent? They are the “backbone” of our food chain, people who work the same soil for generations (often already for several centuries) and live on it, with it and from it.

I ask myself this question because I think that, at least in the industrialised countries of Western Europe - Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France - such original farming populations represent a threatened group that is socially marginalised. After all, they are seen as economically insignificant rustics, deprived of identity as farmers/ peasants/ people living in the countryside.

I got this idea from reading the book “Dit is mijn hof” by the Flemish writer and journalist Chris De Stoop. He describes in detail the life and struggle of those farmers who live in the centuries-old cultivated landscape northwest of Antwerp, those polders along the southern bank of the Scheldt, with such picturesque names as “Prosperpolder”, “Zaligem”, “Arenberg”, and “Hedwige”. At the same time, he describes his own life so far, the life of a farmer’s son who left the farm in the polder after the death of his father, only to return after the suicide of his brother, who had taken over the parental farm, to look after his mother and live on the farm. The animals have been sold, the farmland and meadows leased, and he is threatened with dispossession and eviction from the property. He tries to maintain the house and farm as best he can. At the same time, he closely observes and describes the changes in the landscape, the people and their way of life.

Farmers were expelled and driven from their land to expand the port of Antwerp and gain land for the associated chemical industry. This land was not only arable land and pasture for cattle, but it was also a habitat for grazing birds and other wild animals, fish and different species of plants, trees and herbs. It was a mixed landscape of river arms with salty water, reed belts, riparian fringes, hedgerows, villages and patches of settlements, connected by roads with avenues, into which people had wedged themselves and worked the very fertile soil, washed in by the river over thousands of years and ultimately diked. These people, and rural life, were forced to give way to industrialisation. It meant that not only the habitat of the farmers disappeared but also that of the wild animals that had previously shared this habitat with them. For them, it was decided that a new living space, “new nature,” had to be created: not nature as before, however, where humans and animals had lived together, but “real nature” without humans. Once again, farmers were expelled, their farms demolished, villages like Doel destroyed, tree-lined avenues chopped down, and dikes that had protected the land from floods were cut through to make “room for nature”. The soil that could be fenced off was dug down to the clay and silt layer, turning the cultivated land into a wet marshland. It was fenced off, and trespassing was prohibited: to provide a protected habitat for an untouched “nature”. De Stoop describes almost sarcastically how the grey geese, now possessing the landscape, are changing it. The little clear waters, whose reed edges countless bird species had bred and in which he had swum and fished as a child, are now turned into greenish mud by the goose droppings and almost completely overgrown by the abundant fertiliser. Electric fences were drawn around various parts of this new natural landscape to prevent the geese from becoming prey for foxes.

The avenues had to give way to sandy paths along which “now city dwellers drive from vantage point to vantage point in their SUVs. Reading on the signs erected what nature there is to admire (without, however, being allowed to enter this nature themselves because trespassing is forbidden). Then they try to spot birds through their binoculars, and afterwards let out cries of enthusiasm, only to get back in the car and drive on to the next vantage point”. The last people still living on the edge of these “natural areas” are like “reservation dwellers”, a dying ethnic group - Polderland farmers - who, before they will be gone for good, can still be “visited”. In contrast, De Stoop defiantly states: “Being a farmer is not just any profession, it is your own way of being, it is your destiny and the fulfilment of your life, it is in your blood”.

I find it difficult to read the book quickly. Repeatedly I have to stop and put it aside. I feel De Stoop’s sadness at what is being irretrievably lost, his pity for all the people being driven from their land, the old buildings, and the familiar landscape. I understand his sarcasm as he describes the broken promises of politicians and the zeal and stubbornness of the administration. But what pains me most is that I begin to share his anger at the nature associations and the conservationists, whom he contemptuously calls “the Greens”. It pains me because I fundamentally share the goals of “the Greens”: the artificial preservation of biodiversity, natural biotopes, and what we generally call “nature”. Chris De Stoop opened my eyes with his narrative and made me question: Is what is to be created here still nature? Is it not an artificial product, “made” but not “grown”, created on the drawing boards of landscape planners who design and try to realize their idea of “nature” in these places? Is nature really being preserved here, or is it not a compensation for (irresponsible, excessive) human intervention for human avarice and greed with port expansions and industrial plants? And at whose expense is this compensation? Who ultimately pays the bill with his land and his property?

I realize that this book is so close to me because it questions the self-understanding I have had up to now. Living ecologically responsible, protecting nature and adapting my behaviour in living, travelling and consumption to these principles seemed so self-evident to me until now. Nature conservation organizations like Greenpeace and others could count on my donations. Now I have to ask myself: with my assistance, with my support, am I not contributing to the destruction of living space, to social injustice? By focusing on ecology, have I not lost sight of people and their living environment? Once again, I realize how accurate and topical Pope Francis’ call for an “integral ecology” is, which does not play the ecological and the social off against each other but sees them as two sides of the same coin. I realize how essential it is to look closely to understand “the issue” before I can form a judgement. How easy it can be to stand up for oppressed and disadvantaged people in a distant country and to fight for the preservation of their habitat (for example, Amazonia) (and this is and will remain necessary in the future. But how easy it is to overlook oppression, disadvantage and the destruction of habitats and realities of people “on one’s own doorstep” (in this case, the Polderland) - because one thinks that it serves good and noble ideas and goals.

Contemplatively I meditate on the sentence: “Reality is above the idea” (Laudato Si’ §110) - and begin to understand...

Original in English



Nature Contact: A Pathway to Enhance Human and Environmental Health

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While reflecting and writing these words, I look at the trees surrounding me. I know my life depends on them and the oxygen they release through photosynthesis. The soil and all the creatures that live in it are necessary for my survival. So are the insects pollinating the plants that feed me and other animals, and so on. My health and other human health rely entirely on nature. In turn, my actions, and humanity's actions as a whole, impact nature. We are part of nature, and in the last hundreds of years, we have been relentlessly destroying it.

Human and environmental health are unarguably intertwined. As humans, we need nature to survive, be healthy and experience well-being. We currently witness unprecedented, dangerous, and life-threatening human-driven environmental degradation that impacts us in several dimensions. With these dynamics as a backdrop, I'd like to focus on a positive outlook on human and ecological health.

Most of us know intuitively that spending time in natural environments is beneficial to our health, and the covid-19 pandemic has helped some of us become more aware of it. Spending time with nature can also inspire attitudes and behaviour of care for nature – and if we care for it, it will undoubtedly get in better shape. Being physically present in the outdoors leads to improved human and environmental health. In the last few years, there has been increasing scientific research about this. Doctors are starting to prescribe contact with nature as a health treatment and as preventive medicine (e.g., in Japan, South Korea and Scotland), and nature contact is being recognized as a potential strategy to help change the human relationship with the environment.

My Personal Experience with Nature

I have experienced how contact with nature can be beneficial to health and how it can change us. I grew up in the Argentine countryside. My father had a neurological disease, and my mother thought it would be good for him to live in a rural area. So, my childhood and adolescence were spent close to nature. For many years, I did not realise how blessed we were and how important nature was to the whole family and myself. In my young adulthood, I started realising and becoming aware of my deep love for nature and how it had provided me with a safe space during life's ups and downs. I felt humbled and grateful. This love fed in me a strong desire to care for nature. As I write these words, the trees I'm looking at, the birds

singing around me, and the soil I lie on - such abundance, beauty and generosity soothe me and inspire me to act with care and compassion. I feel compelled to do so, to try to reciprocate the gifts nature offers so generously. Through this personal experience and the subsequent research I conducted, I came to the conviction that if humans come closer to nature, a desire to care (more) for it can be born. As a consequence, both human and environmental health can improve.

What does Science have to Say?

Scientists are studying and proving what many of us intuitively know: nature is good for us. Being physically present in nature can strengthen our immune system, making us more resistant to diseases and helping us recover from them. It can improve our cardiovascular health by lowering our blood pressure and heart rate variability; it can increase our life expectancy; prevent and fight obesity; help us sleep better; among other health benefits. Furthermore, studies have proven that simply looking at nature from a hospital room can help accelerate recovery after a surgery or medical intervention. Contact with nature can also improve our mental health by helping reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression; make us feel happier and more satisfied with our lives; restore our attention after periods of prolonged concentration; and reinvigorate our creativity (all of which have been measured through cortisol levels, MRIs, surveys, interviews, etc.).

Besides all its potential health benefits, contact with nature can also influence our views, attitudes and behaviour towards the environment. Spending time in nature can nurture positive feelings towards it, inspiring environmentally sustainable attitudes and behaviour. Jacques-Yves Cousteau expressed this idea, saying, "People protect what they love". Some authors have referred to contact with nature as a *leverage point for sustainability transformation*. In systems theory, leverage points are small actions within a complex system that can significantly influence the system as a whole. Getting close(r) to nature can have a structural, systemic influence on society as a whole, helping it shift towards the much-needed sustainability transformation.

How to Harness Nature's Potential?

Different variables determine how contact with nature affects human health, attitudes and behaviour towards nature. Studies indicate that certain conditions are conducive to improved health and pro-environmental behaviour. For instance, using our senses to perceive nature helps us connect with it: listening, smelling, touching, looking and even tasting. The more contact we give to our senses, the better. And the more we let go of our rational mind, our judgements and preconceptions, to allow room for sensory experiences, the better. Likewise, the time we spend in natural environments and the frequency also play a role. Broadly speaking, spending more time outdoors will significantly impact our health more than just a short period, and so will being in nature more often.

When I moved from Argentina to Belgium in September 2019, I was fascinated by the novelty of discovering new cultures, new landscapes, and new worldviews. And I was also uprooted from almost everything familiar to me - but nature helped me feel at home away from home

(and still does). When the pandemic arrived, life as we knew it was shaken up – but nature provided a safe, restoring and familiar feeling once again. In this context, I conducted scientific research about the potential of contact to gear human relationships with nature. I interviewed practitioners and guides of the Japanese practice of “*shinrin yoku*”, or forest bathing. I opened my heart and mind to receive unique and remarkable stories of personal transformation brought about by a connection with nature. I could recognize in others what I have been experiencing myself and what I witnessed in my own family: nature heals. It heals us, heals our relationship with others and with nature itself. What I learned through my research has been and continues to be revealing, and it has strengthened my firm belief that one of the key strategies we can resort to during this time of threatened environmental crisis is to get people close(r) to nature. If we want to heal ourselves and nature, let us spend more time with it. Let us open ourselves to all it has to offer. It can give us back our lost balance.

Remembering and Recognizing the Interconnectedness of Human and Environmental Health

Human health depends on nature and the well-being of nature. If nature suffers, so does humanity. If nature thrives, so do human beings. In the present context of grave human-driven environmental destruction, the ‘simple’ act of spending time in nature can be powerful. It can help improve human health, remind us of the interconnectedness between ourselves, other species and the world we live in, and inspire a change in our relationship with nature.

Original in English



Cry of the Soil and Cry of the Poor: A Case of Grand North-Kivu in the DR Congo

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In the face of the current environmental crisis, the world is becoming aware of the importance of the elements of nature for life and even the survival of human beings on earth. To this crisis has been added that of Covid-19, which has further exposed the fragility of human beings on earth. Covid-19 showed that everything is connected and that the health of human beings depends on that of nature. In this multi-sectoral crisis, the issue of global warming attracts the most attention. At the same time, other equally important aspects of the environment, such as safeguarding biodiversity, sustainable development and soil protection, are relegated to the background. This article reminds us of the importance of soil for the life of the people in the highlands of Grand North-Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In this region, the soil is degrading under the combined effects of natural factors and abusive exploitation by the local population. These factors of soil degradation are presented in the first part of the article. In the second part, soil degradation and its socio-economic consequences are described. Finally, solutions to repair the soil and restore human life in harmony with nature are proposed in the last section.

Factors Behind the Degradation of the Soil

Despite its indispensable role in the life of humanity, the soil of the highlands of Grand North-Kivu is subject to multiple physical and human-caused degradations, which must be denounced.

From the physical point of view, factors to be taken into account include the steepness of the slopes, the advanced deterioration of the rocks, the granularity of the soils, the sparse cover of vegetation, and the erosive potential of the climate. In fact, in the highlands of Grand North-Kivu, the hills' slopes are steep, accentuating erosion. The sedimentary rocks of the soils have experienced a high degree of weathering, and productive soils full of clay are resistant to erosion. (Salomon, M. 2001; Kakule, V. 2020a.) However, these soils are weakened by a sparse cover of vegetation. The almost complete deforestation of the area, at an annual rate of 2.2%, exposes it to erosion (Kambale et al., 2021.) Finally, the abundant rainfall in the area, ranging from 1655.2 to 1114 mm, accompanied by a tendency for violent downpours of precipitation, causes widespread erosion in the region (Kakule, V. 2020a.)

From the anthropogenic perspective, factors driving upland erosion include historical land use, human population densities, land tenure policies, and ways in which the environment and land have been used and valued. Humans have occupied and cultivated the area for three centuries (Kasay, K. 1988.) It is, therefore, more eroded than a recently occupied area. Human population densities are high and contribute to erosion as the demand for arable land and the pressure on the physical environment increases (Kakule, V. 2008.) Under extensive agriculture conditions, the population-supporting capacity is estimated at 167.8 inhabitants/km² for the cool highlands, located between 2000 and 3000 m above sea level, and 166.7 inhabitants/km² for the warm highlands, situated between 1400 and 2000 m above sea level (Sys and Ranst, 1996.) Once these thresholds are exceeded, soil erosion occurs in these congested areas. The land tenure system also influences erosion insofar as it defines the use of land and the anti-erosion measures implemented. In Grand North-Kivu, land allocation for agriculture is temporary. As a result, farmers are not encouraged to install sustainable erosion control measures in their fields, which exposes the soil to erosion.

In contrast, a long-term grant would encourage the installation of such facilities. Human use of the environment, including cultivation practices and the removal of natural resources, directly affects land degradation because the soil and vegetation are negatively affected by human action. Farmers plough downhill, which accelerates erosion. The light bush fires and burn fields destroy organic matter that burying plant detritus during ploughing would be better conserved. Cutting down trees removes a lot of vegetation from the fields, degrading the vegetation cover and exposing the bare soil to erosion. Finally, the inhabitants' modes of land use, which correspond to the crops grown and the agrarian structures, have an impact on the erosive process depending on the degree of protection that the plants offer to the soil and on the organisation of the agrarian landscape (Kakule, V. 2020a.) In this regard, cultivating tubers such as potatoes and cassava, generally practised in Grand North-Kivu, depletes soil fertility. Cereals such as wheat, also grown in Grand North-Kivu, provide only weak soil cover and cause erosion. The agrarian structure of the highlands, containing few wooded areas that would stem erosion, experiences more degradation than an agro-system with reforestation.

Combined, these variables cause multiple consequences in the physical environment and society.

Soil Degradation and Its Socio-Economic Consequences

The adverse effects of the actions of the inhabitants of Grand North-Kivu on nature contribute to the degradation of vegetation, the decrease in the fertility of the lands, soil erosion, land scarcity, land conflicts and the violation of protected areas.

The degradation of vegetation resulting from deforestation by farmers as they develop their fields and pastures is, in some places, combined with the consequences of global warming and soil infertility. This degradation is manifested by the retreat of random forests and the difficulty of certain environments to evolve towards a climax forest (Minani, B. 2021.)

The second consequence of human activities is the degradation of the soil cover of the highlands of Grand North-Kivu. This degradation is manifested first by a change in the physical and chemical properties of the soil, a decrease in the fertility of the land and, consequently, in agricultural yield. It is also manifested by soil erosion. This erosion is reflected in certain patterns that are seen in the landscape. The different traces of erosion notable in the highlands are areolar stripping and levelled areas, gullies and linear incision forms, land movements and corresponding forms, and the digging of valleys and the modification of the fluvial morphology that results from it. Areolar scouring is insidious and imperceptible in cultivated fields but exposes the foundations of houses in settlements. Gullies cause linear forms of incision, which are, in order of increasing size, "furrows", "ravines", and "gullies." The ground movements are of three categories: the falling of objects, slides and flows. These leave the landscape heaped with materials that have moved from other places. Finally, the increased sinking of the valleys and the erosion of the river banks are noted in the countryside and the city. These phenomena are accompanied by enormous losses of land that can compromise the future of agriculture in the area (Salomon, M. 2001; Kakule, V. 2016 and 2020a). These soil degradations in Grand North-Kivu constitute a real cry of the land.

These degradations are compounded by other effects: land scarcity, land conflicts, and the violation of protected areas. The demographic explosion in the mountains of Grand North-Kivu is causing a decline in the land/human ratio in areas where human density has already exceeded the population-supporting capacity. This situation leads to a shortage of land as the land available for agriculture is no longer sufficient to meet the high demand of many families in search of cultivable land. Thus, overpopulation leads to the overexploitation of arable land to feed a rapidly growing population. Fallowing is shortened or eliminated, leading to a decrease in soil fertility and productivity per unit area. As subsistence farming is practised in Grand North-Kivu, malnutrition sets in, and the population become impoverished, living only on the harvest or the income from its food crops and a few rare export crops (CO.TE.DE.R, 2002; Kakule M. and Hangi. 2002; and Kakule, V. 2020b.) To overcome this economic problem, people are expanding their farms at the expense of forests and even turning land previously unsuitable for agriculture, such as steep slopes and lowlands, into fields.

This land shortage is accentuated by a legal vagueness maintained by the opposition between the customary land law of the indigenous populations of Grand North-Kivu and the modern land law developed by the Congolese state. Customary land law grants land use for a very short period, while modern land law grants exploitation permits for a more extended period. The combination of all these factors leads to land conflicts, with farmers competing for control of small plots of land and the rich manipulating customary and modern rights to take over large tracts of land, which they usually develop into livestock farms (Mafikiri, A. 1994 and 1996). In addition, in the forest plains of Grand North-Kivu and Ituri, people are being massacred, their property looted, and their land coveted.

And finally, the scarcity of land is leading the population of Grand North-Kivu to violate protected areas. In this case, National Parks and forest reserves create fields and pastures to hunt and collect timber. These violations are also committed by the bourgeoisie, who take

over certain reserves by manipulating modern and customary land law and armed gangs. These socio-economic problems resulting from land degradation constitute a genuine cry for the poor in Grand North-Kivu's mountains.

As with the factors leading to erosion, the solutions proposed to all these problems have physical and human dimensions.

Soil Repair and the Restoration of Harmony in Social Life

Solutions have been proposed to problems related to soil erosion in the highlands of Grand North-Kivu that reflect a rational development integrating interventions both on the physical environment and social and economic measures. The challenge is to fight against land degradation to sustain agriculture in the mountains and thus safeguard natural resources for the development of future generations. The soil is a non-renewable resource for the continuation of human life. It is therefore urgent to protect it.

Stopping soil erosion requires the development of terraces and anti-erosion hedges, such as agroforestry, applying soil conservation methods, reforestation and a certain degree of agricultural mechanisation. Executing these works requires prior sensitisation of the actors and land reform. It is accompanied by the emigration of the population, family planning and the diversification of activities other than agriculture.

Before proposing erosion control measures, it is necessary to raise the awareness of the various actors involved in the operation. The methods chosen must be freely accepted by the peasant farmers within their financial means and adapted to the physical conditions of the mountains of Grand North-Kivu (Kakule, M. and Hangi, N. 2002.) In addition, since erosion control measures involve privatising the land, securing land ownership and rationally allocating the land to appropriate uses is necessary. These prerequisites require the agreement of the customary local leaders and the involvement of the State (Kalambay, L. 1989 and Mafikiri, A. 1996.)

Once all have accepted soil protection as a necessity, it is up to the peasant farmers in the highlands, aided by the development technicians, to restore the terraces and anti-erosion hedges that have been neglected for decades. These other anti-erosion techniques should be added, such as conservation of soil fertility through organic or chemical adjustments, agroforestry and reforestation. As an epilogue, we can propose possible mechanisation of agriculture, but under conditions that respect the environment, intending to reserve part of the efforts and time of the peasant farmers for anti-erosion management (Sys, 1992; UNDP et al., 1998 & Kakule, V. 2020a).

Finally, demographic and economic solutions must be added to support these physical land-use methods. Since overpopulation is a significant cause of land degradation in Grand North-Kivu, land erosion must be accompanied by family planning and the decongestion of overpopulated areas through emigration to new population centres, generally located in the neighbouring lowlands to the north and west (Jones and Egli, 1984; Wils, Caraël and Tondeur, 1986.) This process, begun in the past but interrupted for a time, ought to be reactivated. The conditions for the success of these migrations, which are encouraged, must be ensured by the

pacification of the region and the provision of various facilities within the new centres of attraction. Finally, to avoid overexploitation of the land, it is necessary to diversify economic activities in the highlands by developing cash crops, crafts, industry and tourism. This would allow farmers to increase their income, live off resources other than the overexploited land, and reduce soil degradation (C.A.P.S.A., 1994 and Kakule, V. 2020a.) All these solutions are in answer to the cry of the land and the cry of the poor.

In conclusion, faced with soil degradation and the consequent decrease in food production, society in Grand North-Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo is becoming impoverished and losing its cohesion. The cry of community matches the cry of the soil. In order to respond to these two cries, social and technical measures have been proposed to curb soil erosion and control the human occupation of the land. These measures aim not only at social life in harmony with the mother earth but also at the sustainable development of the whole region.

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Translation Fr Hurd



Cry of the Land; the Whimper of the Poor

Jim Strzok SJ

A former missionary in East Africa

The Cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are becoming increasingly serious and alarming.

- Pope Francis

February 2006. Fr. Joseph Ekalimon's vintage Toyota Land Cruiser pickup truck trundled along Kenya's Kitale-Lodwar Highway loaded with food and water supplies, the weight of which flattened the vehicle's rear spring suspension near to breaking. Highway A1 connects central Kenya to its largest and remotest county, Turkana. The highway is maintained, but we were now negotiating steep canyons and water fords, sometimes broken roadway through the Cherangany Hills of West Pokot, easing the truck through streams and broken pavement, careful not to damage the truck's suspension. We had stopped overnight in the last commercial outpost, Kitale, loading our truck with food and water at the city market. The food was a gift from several faith-based organizations (FBOs). Most everyone in Kenya knew of the drought and famine in Turkana, so the owner added his gift of water bottles and food, adding to our truck's overload.

As we left the green broadleaf forests of West Pokot, our road dropped rapidly into Africa's Great Rift Valley, into a huge flat, broad lava plain called the Loturerei desert. The change in scenery is dramatic: a flat, sandy, Turkwel river flood plain stretches to the horizon, meandering northward from these mountains through this desert flatland to Lodwar, the capital of Turkana County, onward to the world's largest desert lake, Lake Turkana. The change in scenery was only the beginning of many big surprises for this newcomer.

As we continued driving north, dwarf bushes, shrubland, an occasional acacia tree and tall, thin termite nests baked under a cloudless sky. By midday, hot winds blew off the grassless, barren ground, making us feel like we were driving into an open oven. During Turkana's long dry season but especially during drought, these hot winds dry the thin topsoil and scorch any grass, leaving little food for cattle on the open plain. To survive, goats and sheep must feed on the bark and leaves of woody plants. Taller giraffes and camels browse the acacia leaves along riverbanks. During drought, shepherds living away from the river travel far from their homes to find forage for their animals. Almost inevitably, this leads to conflict over scarce fodder for their animals. Before the millennium, a drought cycle happened about once every 15 years. Since the Millennium, drought has occurred about every five years. Since 2020 because of extreme climate changes, there has been a perennial drought in this region. Its effects are alarming.

The Turkana region receives only 1.98 inches (50.4 mm) of rain annually. Temperatures range from 25°C to 60°C. Its climate is very harsh (Arid and Semi-Arid Land type). In short, Turkana is hot and very dry. Most of the region is covered with Rift Valley lava flows. The topsoil is thin with almost no organic matter because of high temperatures and lack of rain. Under primarily cloudless skies, the sun bears down mercilessly from mid-morning to late afternoon. During drought, there is hunger, heavy livestock loss, clashes over rangeland, and starvation.

Forty miles from Lodwar, a young shepherd boy of about twelve runs across the dry, treeless landscape towards us, waving his empty plastic water bottle. Father slows and stops. After offering him a drink and filling his water bottle, we continue toward Lodwar. Father explains the boy's plight to me: "The boy was grazing his father's cattle almost ten miles from their home. I stopped because this may be the only water he would have until sundown. I used to shepherd my father's flock during drought. I know gnawing thirst. This led me into serious conflict with neighbours."

Before reaching our destination, Lodwar, Fr. Joseph drives off-road towards a grove of trees along the Turkwel into one of his sub-parishes. If the change in scenery leaving the mountains were dramatic, this meeting would be amazing. We are greeted almost immediately by tall, dark-skinned, brightly beaded women, men and women wearing a *Masai shuka* tied at the shoulder, and some children wearing the *shuka* or colourful rummage. A few naked infants are carried in the arms of their mothers. They gather, having recognized Father's pickup. After greetings and introductions, we are told of the water and food scarcity due to the current famine, and so we share with them some of the precious bottles of water, maize (corn) meal, flour, salt, tea and sugar we have carried with us for this reason from Kitale. As we leave, Father Joseph promises to return for mass tomorrow. We stop again with similar receptions at two more of his outstations, leaving precious water and food each time.

There are few places on earth where the consequences of climate change are seen so dramatically. This was my first trip. I would return to Turkana and several countries of the Horn of Africa over the next thirteen years, each time experiencing the growing effect of climate change on pastoralists – people who have little to do with the causes of climate change but endure some of its most brutal effects.

About one million Turkana live in this hot, desolate land competing for sparse grassland with other pastoralists from Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia. The name 'Turkana' is probably a corruption of 'turkwen', which means 'cave people'. It is possible they originated in the mountain caves of Uganda, west of their present home in Kenya. They first lived further north but, under pressures of Ethiopian expansion, were forced south into competition with their own and neighbouring pastoralists. Competition continues and has intensified as the climate changes and grassland decreases. Conflict resolution and peacebuilding are essential.

We reached Lodwar just before sundown. After offloading the remainder of our cargo at St. Augustine Cathedral's procurator. We rest. I am not used to the 30°C (86F) heat, so I sit long outside, reflecting on the day, looking at the dark sky with its brilliant stars, and waiting for the evening air to cool so I can finally rest. Before sunrise, we pray, have breakfast, and head to the first of Fr. Joseph's sub-parishes.

When many of us in the world are showering and preparing breakfast, I learn that a Turkana woman will meet and walk with neighbours to the nearest water well to collect water for the day. She will share news and stories of the past day and then trek back to her thatched huts with her precious water. If she lives near the river, she will draw surface water or, during drought, dig down into the sandy river bed to find subsurface gravel flow. Even these sources dry up in extreme drought, and she will have to find other means of obtaining water or she and her family will die. While driving between villages a week later, Fr. Joseph and I slowed for a herd of camels running across our road. Behind the herd of camels, a woman and her daughter quickly followed, drawing a burrow carrying jerry cans tied to its panniers.

We were witnessing another method of finding water in a drought. A woman will hobble her camels for weeks until they are thirsty and then release them. If there is any water to be found, the camels, with their keen sense of water, will find and uncover it with their sharp hooves. She will water her camels and collect her water before returning home. In extreme drought, even these measures do not work. Camels cannot find water and so cattle, and then people die.

Elders are left to starve first, then the children, and lastly, the strong adults, hoping they will survive to renew the family. During subsequent famine relief trips into this region, I witnessed families travelling on foot, their elders or their sick carried on carts, stopping while a child or elder breathed its last. After burying their dead, this sad troop moved on. We stood in quiet reverence for this slow crucifixion happening before us. Pope Francis said, "Christ is crucified on many an obscure hill." Living on the edge, as many of these people now do because of climate change, has become a harsh reality. It is difficult for people, like me, from a wealthy western country to understand famine until experiencing it. It became a moment of ecological conversion for me. "Live simply so that others may simply live" became my mantra and a way of life. For we have so much, and our rampant consumerism affects unseen people worlds away.

Shortly after leaving Lodwar, Fr. Joseph and I reached the first sub-parish we had visited before, sharing some of the precious water and food we had brought from Kitale. This morning we are met with ululating women, more villagers and the ever-present children. They accompany our truck to the shade of a grove of acacia trees along the Turkwel River. Here, we celebrate mass under our church - a canopy of acacia trees. Father's altar is a simple wooden table roughly shaped from acacia branches; behind it, two smaller branches bound together form a cross.

Father begins mass in his native Turkana language signing with the cross. Traditional songs follow an older catechist who reads the scripture for the day, and both he and Fr. Joseph expound on God's word. I am impressed with the quiet reverence for God's word and then for the celebration of the Eucharist. After communion, received by only a few, mass ends. After the mass, I am welcomed in front of the altar by the women in a kind of round dance, welcomed and honoured as a guest to their village and their lives. I feel humbled, blessed and grateful. We then share cornmeal porridge and sweetened tea at their nearby primary school. We visit a classroom with its dirt floor, palm frond thatched roof and open windows, with students sitting on the floor or proudly pointing to and enunciating the English alphabet

chalking onto a smooth stucco wall. At the same time, other children repeat each letter, learning English.

Later that afternoon, we visited one of the largest refugee camps in Africa. In 1990, The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) established the Kakuma refugee camp about 150 kilometres northwest of Lodwar for unaccompanied children fleeing conflicts in Sudan and Ethiopia. Growing from around 8,000 refugees, the camp expanded to over 180,000 during further conflicts in East Africa. In 1982, the Diocese of Lodwar and the Kenya government, assisted by *Misserior*, Germany and other FBOs, drilled and outfitted hundreds of wells in this arid region, supplying water for the villages and the growing camps. During drought, maintaining wells is essential. So, the diocese formed pump maintenance units (PMI).

Water wells present two problems. The first is mechanical. They wear out. The second is a more serious problem – “spiking” the pumps. Pumps located away from villages are vulnerable to competing herders. A selfish desire to kill off a competing tribe takes only opening a wellhead in your competitor’s backyard and dropping in a few handfuls of stones down the borehole. This locks the lift rods from operating the piston and lifting water, effectively destroying the pump and water source for the animals and people depending on it. Today, the European Union and many other sources are installing solar arrays and pumps to irrigate crops and allow pastoralists to become farmers. Through Caritas, numerous FBOs, and civil societies, the diocese offers maintenance, security, peace, and reconciliation between tribes.

Following the 1990 Somali civil wars, UNHCR established another larger camp, Dadaab, in Kenya, near the Somali border. In a few years, it became the biggest refugee camp in the world, with over 200,000 refugees. Huge environmental effects follow these large camps. Camps require fuel – fuel for cooking and light. I have already described the scrub bush and the few acacia trees covering about 8% of this arid region. Because of the need for fuel, trees and even large bushes are cut for fuel. Local villagers cut and sometimes burn into charcoal (for lighter transport), an ever-widening circle of destruction around the camps.

Trees not only provide shade and fuel. A tree’s canopy softens the erosive power of raindrops. Its roots also open pathways for the little precipitation that does fall to enter the subsurface aquifers. When trees are cut, raindrops fall like small bomblets onto the now barren ground, eroding the thin topsoil and carrying it away downstream. The shallow soil hardens into an almost brick-like hardness. When topsoil is removed, the land becomes useless. This process is called desertification. It happens around the camps.

The Green Belt Movement of Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan environmental activist and Africa’s first woman Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, works to stem desertification. A hearty, well-known medicinal tree that grows well in arid regions is called the Neem tree, called “*muarubaini*” in Kiswahili. *Muarubaini* means the tree of forty cures. It is a hardwood that thrives well in arid climates and can reach up to thirty meters in its long hundred-year life providing medicine, shade and even timber. Through an FBO called Zonata International, we

offer small stipends to women in local parishes to plant and care for Neem trees until they have grown to a height of a camel.

Conclusions

Extreme weather in east Africa is pushing people to the brink. The Kenya government, several international NGOs, and FBOs are providing solar irrigation schemes to enable villages to grow vegetables and plant trees, which is admirable. There is also an effort to relocate refugees from the Kakuma and Dadaab camps into nearby villages where vegetables and cash crops may be grown.

Neighbouring Uganda has much more arable land. It also has a more generous resettlement program that encourages refugees to claim and settle on its land. Perhaps it is time for the UNHCR to change relocation policies, especially in the face of the recent climate changes.

I was told by a Jesuit Relief Service friend who had just returned from the Kakuma refugee camp that the World Food Program would cut the monthly supplement of food in the camp by almost one-third this next year. The reason is the growing number of refugees, including the numbers now in Europe due to the invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile, on 25 March 2022, the UN begged for humanitarian assistance for 6.9 million Somalis dying of lack of food and water.

Original in English



Guaranteeing Collective Land Rights for Ethnic Groups in Colombia

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For Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples and other local and Campesino¹ communities, the land is not just the physical environment they inhabit, nor is it a place that can be separated from their way of life. The land, and its sources of livelihood, are the result of an intimate and integral relationship that has been shaped over time and throughout their collective history. Therefore, when Indigenous and Afro-Colombian movements claim their rights to the land, the communal nature of that relationship and the historical nature of their tenures are generally at the forefront. Therefore, the land, territory and water environments occupied by ethnic groups are inexorably linked to their ways of life and practices that form their identities and sense of place; they are an essential safeguard for their survival (Márquez, 2019). From a socio-ecological perspective, land rights such as these cannot be comprehended solely in terms of tenure and ownership; instead, it is necessary to identify the array of natural and social systems that interact and configure multiple bio-dependencies that define both the collective and the individual being (Partelow, 2018).

The Indigenous and Afro-Colombian social movements face socio-environmental challenges which, according to Senent-De Frutos (2020), threaten, hinder and prevent them from sustaining their ways of life into the future and fulfilling their human and social potential. This means that the right to land and the more contemporary discussions around the right to water and biodiversity must be addressed from an ethical perspective that promotes dignity and intercultural environmental justice in the long term.

The following discussion will focus on Colombia, an emblematic country since social movements from Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have converged in the cause for biological and cultural assets, managing to table the issue of the constitutional recognition of the collective right to land. The main characteristics of the relationship between community and territory will be explored, and how these communities' ways of life are models for environmental management.

¹ Translator's note: *Campesino*, literally translated into English as "peasant". A broad term used in Spanish America to include "peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers", as defined by Via Campesina International Peasants' Movement. See: <https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/>

Territorial Rights, in Spirit and Reality

Colombia is a country of contrasting regions in terms of population, history, politics and ecology². Ethnic groups are present nationwide: in some places, the people are more concentrated, while territorial rights are more advanced in others. According to the official census of 2018, the Indigenous population in Colombia numbers some 1,905,617 individuals who belong to 115 different native peoples, and there are 4,671,160 people of African descent (4.4% and 9.34% of the national population). While these statistics on ethnic groups in the country are contested, their presence in regions of immense environmental importance is undeniable.

Concerning collective land rights and the management of specially protected ecosystems, since the 1991 Constitution, the country has developed a wide range of laws and regulations to guarantee ethnic groups access to land, collective tenure, and mechanisms of participation and regulation of their territories. The safeguards for ethnic communities enshrined in the Constitution detail forms of autonomy and government, including legal structures of collective land ownership and territories (Velásquez, 2016). Act 160 of 1994 and Act 70 of 1993 for Indigenous communities and Black communities, respectively, have succeeded in establishing, through regulatory decrees, a mechanism to oblige the State to guarantee forms of land tenure and governance in territories to allow culture and identity to be preserved and sustained into the future.

This comprehensive framework of guarantees for ethnic groups has become, paradoxically, in a country with serious human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL). This achievement is due to the fact that, in Colombia, both the Indigenous and the Afro-descendant social movements organize and advocate to a very high degree, and they have national and international networks to support the inclusion of guarantee-based approaches in the field of civil, political and environmental rights (Garavito & Lam 2011). Legal strategies have likewise played their part in defining the content and scope of the rights to territory in the constitutional and transitional justice spheres. The numbers for the recognition of territorial rights are emphatic; 28.9 million hectares have been recognized as Indigenous reservations - one-quarter of the national territory - while an estimated 5,715,184.7 hectares are territories collectively owned by people of African descent.

In both cases, these are collective land tenure systems in areas of conservation interest, such as the biogeographical region of Chocó, the Amazon's inter-Andean valleys, the tropical dry forests and the coastal regions of the Pacific and the Caribbean. More and more evidence shows the contribution of the ways of life of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples to

² Broadly and geographically, the country is divided into 5 regions: Pacific, Amazon, Caribbean, Orinoquia and Andes. In addition, these are subdivided for political-administrative purposes into 32 departments and 1122 municipalities. However, these State boundaries do not necessarily correspond to territorial rights, since an Indigenous community may have a collective reservation or title that is interdepartmental or includes more than one municipality. The situation is similar for Afro-descendant communities, mainly in the Pacific where collective titles are supra-departmental and can encompass up to 15 municipalities.

biodiversity conservation (Caballero, 2016; Martin et al., 2018; RRI, 2021). However, because biodiversity conservation areas often overlap with territories inhabited and claimed by Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant peoples and local communities, the enhancement or expansion of biodiversity conservation can significantly impact these communities (RRI, 2021). This can cause conflict between local communities (with their expectations and needs associated with their livelihoods) and environmental institutions, whose expectations and requirements are focused on protecting local biodiversity.

Another obstacle to collective land rights and the participation of ethnic groups in the governance of the commons is the context of conflict around the access, use and distribution of land, which is typical in Columbia. Mies and Shiva (1997, 23) link these circumstances to the neoliberal economic model, based on the accumulation of capital through the extraction of natural resources, unequally affecting the well-being of communities who depend on these resources to survive.

In coastal areas and the centre of wet forests, ethnic groups face the severe impacts of climate variability and environmental changes, given that their livelihoods are highly dependent on the supply of ecological resources and the well-being of ecosystems. Regarding deforestation, for example, in the first three months of 2022, there have been more than 2,000 forest fires and unauthorized burnings, according to data from the Colombian Ministry of the Interior. These deforestation trends are mainly driven by illegal extractive economic activities such as illegal mining, the increase in illegal crop cultivation (particularly the coca leaf) and the extension of the agricultural frontier. Extensive livestock farming, in particular, is at fault for agricultural land expansion, which in recent years has harmed social relationship schemes and damaged the biophysical dynamics of ecosystems.

Challenges and Opportunities

Colombia is one of a small set of countries in the region with significant land rights (covering land access, exclusion, administration, management, alienation and exploitation) which new extractivist logging regulations or laws negatively impacting ethnic groups' autonomy would find very hard to repeal. However, large areas of the national territory are yet to be granted to ethnic groups under collective land tenure systems.

Public policy around the instruments of transitional justice created by the Peace Agreement, signed in Colombia in 2016, provides an opportunity still waiting to be exploited. Its implementation marks a transition from the '*peace making*' to the '*peace building*' stage. In this scenario, Indigenous and Afro-descendant people are considered disproportionate victims of the armed conflict and collective subjects of special protection, as was recognized years ago by the Constitutional Court in Orders 004 and 005 of 2009.

Thus, the Agreement has made it possible to open spaces for dialogue with the authorities of ethnic groups who have been victims of violence and its related issues. Moreover, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (in Spanish: Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, JEP) has established that the territory is also a victim of conflict and a legal subject that can suffer damages and must be recompensed. The Peace Agreement thus presents an opportunity to continue campaigning

for social movements and authorities of ethnic groups to advance the protection of the territorial rights of ethnic groups. This is especially the case for those who still live in lands without formal State recognition or in areas such as the Pacific and the Amazon where, despite legal recognition, the effective enforcement of collective land tenure has not been possible in the midst of development projects contrary to the interests of ethnic groups.

Another opportunity is the renewed discussion on rights-based biodiversity conservation, which, since 2016, has had a more apparent impact on global policy through the presentation of the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the UN Human Rights Council. In that report, one of the central themes is the shortcomings in guaranteeing the rights of Indigenous peoples, including those living in natural protected areas or critical biodiversity areas. Indigenous peoples' ancestral lands contain some of the least altered ecosystems, providing the most effective and sustainable form of conservation. The submitted report recognizes that Indigenous peoples maintain strong spiritual ties with the plants, trees and animals that live on their lands, and protecting their territories is a sacred duty. However, States often disregard the contributions of these people to conservation. Therefore, the land titling programme, which is usually approached from an agricultural perspective, cannot be implemented in isolation from conservation policy with justice and rights-based approach.

Similarly, the Coalition for Rights and Resources (RRI) has established that Indigenous people, Afro-descendants and local communities have well-founded claims to more than half of the planet's land area. However, only 10 per cent of their ownership rights are recognized. Addressing this deficit and securing customary land and territorial rights should be a central component of any global strategy to protect or conserve the planet (RRI, 2021). The paradigm of conservation, especially of natural protected areas (NPAs) as empty spaces, has become outdated. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) states that in South America, about 27% of NPAs have some form of overlap with Indigenous territories.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the IUCN World Congress in 2021 approved motion 129, otherwise called 80x25, presented by the Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA). The motion seeks to avoid the point of no return in the Amazon, of which scientists Lovejoy and Nobre have warned since 2018, due to the intensification of deforestation, forest fragmentation and wildfires, which have affected the humidity and essential water cycles in the region. This motion aims to protect 80% of the basin by 2025 while simultaneously preventing the extermination of the Amazonian peoples and ancestral cultures housed in the region. Their physical and cultural survival depends on the adequate conservation of these territories.

There is still a long way to go to safeguard the territorial rights of ethnic peoples in Colombia and the world. Still, we must insist on this relevant and timely justice model, which emphasizes ecological and cultural sustainability and is framed in a context of environmental justice and respect for nature. It is encouraging to see ever-more bridges between the scientific approaches to territorial rights, its multiple interpretations, and the ethical-political prospects of local ecological knowledge. This pathway forges relationships and other frameworks of understanding that can drive the twin programmes of land rights and biodiversity conservation in policies that transform inequalities.

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Rich Agricultural Lands and the Paradox of Food Shortages: Nexus between Land, Poverty and Food Security

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“Our deepest respect for the land is the legacy of generation of farmers, who put food on our tables, preserved our landscape, and inspired us with a powerful work ethic.” - James H.

Douglas

Introduction

The land is supremely important in supporting the livelihoods of all the resources bestowed on humankind. Notably, creation week could be no better without creating land as terrestrial habitat and a resource out of which springs forth grass, vegetables, herb-yielding seed and fruit trees as food for humans and animals. As God’s gift, the land is given to humankind, wherein in the eyes of God, man is just a caretaker with no ultimate ownership of the land. This is demonstrated in Psalms 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” However, ownership quandary stagnates the proper utilization of land to yield food. Over time, land gains value through property and investments that can dislodge the voiceless in the society of their land. To address this issue, the Jewish people were required to return the land to its original owners every Jubilee year. The ability of the land to support sustainable and productive agroecological systems is highly dependent on the interactions among land components and their ability to withstand and adapt to natural and human disturbances. Some common disorders that directly impact food production systems include; extensive grazing, fires, wood clearcutting, change in land use, flooding, and soil movements due to mining and climate change, and they greatly influence food security.

Agricultural Land in the Lens of Property Rights

Land ownership is central to the investments that occur in land. Disproportionate land allocation denies vulnerable members of society the opportunity to reap the benefits that land gives. In Sub-Saharan Africa, rich agricultural lands that ought to alleviate hunger through increased yields have instead turned into warring zones attributed to a lack of ownership rights. The benefits that should accrue from lands cannot be realized when systemic land injustices prevail. Globally, feudalism and landlordism have persistently denied the poor

from accessing lands for their survival. With land linked to the cultural, economic, and political life of most people, any economic activity happening on the land should always adhere to these socio-cultural systems of the people. The growing population in Africa and across the globe impacts land use. In areas where migrant farmers bought land, locals are seizing their land by force; governments' creation of enterprise zones denies smallholders land, preferential access to land and increases poverty. Over time, the usefulness and value of land change both in a legal and social sense. Thus, land continues to be viewed from different perspectives, from being considered a commodity tradable in the market; to land as community property; personal attachment to land through history, culture, and symbolic meaning, and land tied to ethnic and caring practices. These diverse perspectives inform land use and individuals' capacity for what they can produce on their land.

Land and agriculture is a thematic issue that holds the key to the prosperity of regions with a majority of the landless population. The issue of land and agriculture is closely linked with the politics of the land. From a historical perspective, the end of colonial rule in developing countries paved the way for local governments to take control over the resources. Martin et al. (2019) opine that agrarian reforms in the post-colonial period were shaped by the countries' social, economic and political backgrounds. For instance, South Africa in 2000 had a market-oriented agrarian reform that aimed at repossessing lands to initial owners who had been forcefully denied their land. This reform led to a hybrid system involving redistributive and market-oriented reforms that have resulted in mixed outcomes in creating social equality. According to Clark (2019), a 2017 land audit revealed that the white population owns 72 % of the nation's arable land, which only makes up 10 % of the national population. South Africa's inequality in land ownership explains some of the setbacks in feeding a large population comprising consumers with no capacity to produce food.

Arguably, the land is essential for governments, and any idea of land annexation erupts in war. Prevalence of war in Africa and land disputes have been witnessed in Kenya, DRC Congo, and other African countries. Recently, Kenya has seen post-election violence that had roots in land ownership; some communities felt their fertile agricultural lands had been unfairly awarded to particular (ruling) communities. In the run-up to elections, rich agricultural lands are likely to lie fallow for fear of community-led attacks. Though a God-given resource for humans, land has become a source of conflict as the land tenure system favours the rich. Since agriculture is inextricably associated with land, the underlying challenges stem from land's resourcefulness. When the land tenure system is weak, investors shy away from investing in the lands to avoid conflicts and other possible effects of regime changes. Investments in agricultural land for a food-secure nation require strong regulatory regimes that honour communal land and individual rights to land ownership, where land is sold or leased with the free, prior and informed consent of local communities and individual owners. Common land wars and conflicts are stark reminders that the capitalist practice of capital accumulation has overtaken access to land to grow food through financial investments in arable lands at the expense of using the lands to grow food for the landless.

Agricultural land use in a smallholding or large-scale holding affects the social outcome on the targeted persons and the ecology of the land. Large-scale agrarian investments meant to

promote livelihood through employment creation and provision of sufficient foods have become commonplace in developing countries due to the global demand for food and national food shortages. Empirical studies place caution on embracing large-scale investment in agriculture by vested interests due to markedly different outcomes, the worst being the displacement of land users, disruption of customary land tenure institutions, and environmental degradation. Land governance as a natural resource with social, cultural and spiritual dimensions should be carefully examined for social and ecological sustainability. The efforts to bridge national food shortages should not overshadow food sovereignty and cause impoverishment of the poor and vulnerable in society. The evidence indicates that large-scale agricultural land investments affect smallholders, pastoralists, and other land users unable to defend their land ownership rights when infringed.

Further, considerable agriculture investment exacerbates vulnerable groups' marginalisation based on age, gender, prior poverty incidence, and ethnicity. Besides, these investments obliterate communities' resilience by denying access to food and non-food resources. This hot topic cuts across the need for national development and balancing social impacts engendered by such actions. Therefore, the bottom line is for the government and investment partners to adhere to the principles of responsible agricultural investment seeking to promote investments in agriculture while minimizing associated social and ecological consequences.

In global efforts to combat food insecurity, addressing land issues is a nexus of promoting productivity and social justice. With the Government's recognition and preservation of communal lands, resolving land injustices, issuing title deeds, and promoting social equality in land ownership through legislative reforms, land-related disputes and conflicts are expected to subside. Moreover, these efforts grant women the opportunity for equal land ownership even in a patrilineal system favouring men. Since the property system is essential in promoting agriculture, the present policy concerns the alignment of property rights and the promotion of agriculture without excluding the poor. Ideally, enabling the poor to own land property rights reduces over-reliance on a commercialised system for food provision as the individuals are likely to participate in subsistence farming and beyond. Critically, most of the world's poor fall within Sub-Saharan Africa, endowed with rich tillable lands and malnutrition, poverty, and hunger continue to be the order of the day.

Ownership motivates creativity and incentivises innovative ways to adapt to changes. Currently, the exponential world population growth is transforming land-use practices. Land available for agriculture is slowly occupied by building infrastructure since capital-intensive investments on land such as building reward owners much more handsomely than reserving the lands for food production. This transformation also endangers the natural habitats of terrestrial animals; thus, feeding the world comes with many trade-offs that should be carefully planned to create balance in the system supporting livelihoods. Critically observing the past and present situation, land as a resource to produce food dominates all land uses. The pressure on that can adversely influence the extent to which land is primarily allocated for food production. Werkele and Classens (2015) observe that urban agriculture is thriving on the concept of utilizing land on private and public ownership to promote food production,

loosely dubbed as urban foodscape. This trend invites a close examination of the individual efforts to improve the urban population's soil and land productivity and food sufficiency.

Conclusion

The importance of land in supporting agriculture is quite immense. Agrarian reforms meant to promote the usefulness and value of land have resulted in mixed reactions depending on the post-independent governments that presided over such reforms. The vulnerable members of society continue to live deplorable lives of a lack of livelihoods and resources to support their lives. The prevailing social, economic and biophysical environments should enable small-scale farmers, the majority of those suffering from food insecurity, to have access to enough land and land rights. It has been shown that landlessness has a strong correlation with rural poverty. In addition, promoting egalitarian land distribution within a population is a tool for social growth because land rights inequalities are often perceived as injustice leading to frequent breakouts of violent clashes which disrupt social peace, cohesion and development.

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Land and Agriculture

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Introduction

Human beings depend on nature for their survival. For thousands of years, the earth has fulfilled basic requirements like air, water, food, light, habitat, clothes and medicinal plants. However, the excessive exploitation of these resources has become a threat to the very survival of humans because these resources are limited. The future of humanity depends entirely on the judicious and sustainable use of all-natural resources. Our response to the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” must be - Yes, we are! On the other hand, our irresponsible exploitation of nature has many negative impacts on the lives of the present and future generations. Women and children are the most affected by drought, flood, food insecurity, displacement and other calamities. Hence, there is a great need for responsible stewardship from all of us.

An environment consisting of fertile soil, potable water, clean air and sustained biodiversity is indispensable for the existence and development of human and animal life on earth. Humans are a product of nature, but we can still transform nature and negatively or positively influence the environment. Our indiscriminate land use and deforestation have already caused the extinction of about a million species. This loss of biodiversity imperils the earth’s interconnected ecosystems, threatening human life and settlements with a shortage of food, clean water and air and weakening natural protection against extreme weather and natural disasters.

Peaceful coexistence with nature has been integral to India’s culture, long-lasting traditions, practices, customs, art, crafts, festivals, food, beliefs, rituals and folklore. Ingrained within us is the philosophy that the ‘entire natural world exists in harmony’, reflected in the famous Sanskrit phrase ‘*Vasudhaivakutumbakam*’, which means, “the entire earth is one family”. This phrase is mentioned in ‘*Mahaupanishad*’, which is probably a part of the ancient Indian text, ‘*Atharva Veda*.’ In ancient days, humans had a peaceful co-existence with nature. But this equilibrium has been disturbed due to our irresponsible stewardship of natural resources. As a result, the balance in nature has been disturbed by the constant threats of flood, drought, hurricanes, climate change etc. For peaceful coexistence, judicious use of natural resources is vital. Our irrational consumption and over-utilization of resources have already led to environmental disasters and socio-economic inequalities. To mitigate these problems,

resource conservation measures at various levels are crucial and hence were the focal concern of the parties in the recently held COP26.

Soil and Water Conservation: A Critical Way to Address Imbalance

Agriculture, dependent on soil and water resources, is the backbone of the Indian economy. It is estimated that about one-third of the land area in India has been affected by soil erosion. The loss of millions of tons of topsoil every year in India severely impacts the livelihood of the poor and marginalized farmers with marginal land holdings (TERI, 1998). Conservation and prudent management of natural resources are of utmost importance. Hence, community-based natural resource management is now widely accepted as a critical strategy for analysing, planning and managing natural resources equitably and sustainably because conservation of soil and water resources is vital.

Conservation and Regeneration of Natural Resources

Soil and water conservation measures are imperative for the growth of agricultural productivity. The watershed management programs were initiated in India in the early 1970s to augment agricultural productivity, reduce poverty and ensure food insecurity. These measures implemented through community-based watershed management programs arrest soil erosion, reinstate deteriorated agricultural lands, increase water availability to crops, raise groundwater levels, improve land use and strengthen community institutions. Hence, there is a close relationship between natural resource management and poverty alleviation.

Land and Agriculture

Growth in agriculture usually generates improved livelihood opportunities for vulnerable groups. It is a vital human activity that also profoundly impacts the natural environment. The shift to more sustainable food production systems and agricultural practices is a step towards achieving more resilient societies. Agriculture is the leading driver of land-use change and biodiversity loss. Agricultural systems are - at their core - modified ecological systems that remain strongly dependent on nature. The relative stability of these systems and the benefits they provide to billions of people, directly and indirectly, depends on biodiversity.

Although soil and water conservation has increased agricultural productivity and enabled new and additional crops to be grown, its impacts have not been the same for everyone. The increased work on the land has generated more employment opportunities for poor people. However, the inequitable access and distribution of land and other natural resources significantly challenge their achieving food security and poverty reduction. The landless poor and small farmers are often at the mercy of landlords or big farmers. They are forced to work in the landlords' fields for daily survival, leading to the migration of the poor from rural agricultural areas to urban non-agricultural areas.

Studies have shown that implementing soil and water conservation measures in many parts of Maharashtra has brought some positive transformation in the rural areas. There is an increase in the total cropped area, cropping intensity, cropping pattern and crop yields. There is an increase in the irrigated area and commons and wastelands. An increase in the

availability of green pasture and fodder has improved the conditions of animal husbandry and dung fuel availability. Other positive changes have taken place in the rural agricultural sectors. To mention a few: an increase in fodder and fuel consumption both in terms of quantity and quality, mainly due to changes in the land use pattern; change in cropping systems; improved livestock composition; increase in water tables leading to an increase in the number of wells and water quality; decrease in soil erosion; improved soil fertility; improved environmental conditions; positive changes in labour requirements and employment opportunities; changes in income levels and livelihoods, etc., all contributing to several positive changes in the socio-economic structure of the community.

One of the drawbacks of soil and water conservation treatment is that it accentuates inequity: favouring those who have land and those who can afford to invest in wells and pumps. In some cases, measures imposed from above, like bans on grazing and cutting trees, closing of commons, and a ban on keeping goats, have hit the rural poor very hard, especially the Dalits and landless. However, there is greater awareness of equity issues related to the landless, women, Dalits and marginal farmers. Other employment during the project period remains an important benefit to the landless. As agriculture develops, it is noticed that manual labour gives way to mechanization. While the condition of the small landholders has improved as their lands become more productive and are cultivated across the year, the situation of the landless can improve only with further interventions. Increased awareness of gender issues has led to the establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that have helped women save, obtain credit, and become more active and visible. Besides this, women in many rural communities hold sound knowledge of ecosystems and sustainable land management practices. Indigenous women often play an essential role in protecting biodiversity and sustaining knowledge about their lands and territories.

Land and Migration

Land degradation and migration are closely interconnected, mediated by other intervening social, economic, political, demographic, and environmental processes, operating at scales from the local to the global. Households heavily dependent on essential goods and services often turn to migration as a means of diversifying their livelihood strategies and sources of income and/or as an answer to the exigency of adapting to variable environmental conditions and socio-economic uncertainty. Traditional livelihood practices, such as pastoralism, shifting agriculture, and small-scale farming, are inherently mobile and well-adapted to challenging environments but are being pushed aside by more intensive land-use practices.

One-fourth of the earth's surface is land, and the remaining three-fourths is water. It is on land that the forests, grasslands, deserts, grazing lands, farmlands, industries and human shelters exist. In India, 45% of the land is used for agricultural purposes. Twenty-three per cent of land is under forest. Nearly 14% is barren land—eight per cent occupied by habitation. The remaining is kept for grazing. Pressure is generated on land due to the increase in population and the growing number of industries. Sadly, in many places, agricultural land is used for industries.

Forests play a crucial role in maintaining our environment, and they are being denuded in the name of development. Forests cover one-third of the earth. The constant felling of trees disturbs the natural equilibrium, with severe consequences. It affects ecosystem balance, inducing changes in the regional and global climate. Due to the destruction of forests, rainfall has decreased drastically, resulting in increased soil erosion and reduced land fertility. Many organisms have lost their natural habitat and become endangered or extinct.

Land Degradation in Ahmednagar District

Maharashtra's economy is predominantly agricultural. Both food crops and cash crops are grown. The principal crops include rice, *jowar*, *bajra*, wheat, pulses, turmeric, onions, cotton, sugarcane and several oil seeds, including groundnut, sunflower and soybean. The state has vast areas under fruit cultivation, mainly mangoes, bananas, grapes and oranges. The State has 24 per cent of the drought-prone area of the country. Agriculture is predominantly rain-fed, with scattered rainfall across regions and one-third area receiving scanty rain. Soil erosion is quite significant in regions receiving short periods of heavy rainfall and is accelerated by the absence of vegetation and undulating topography. Soil and water conservation measures have the potential to turn barren land into a fertile one.

Ahmednagar District is a semi-arid and rain shadow region, and the green cover is shallow compared to other parts of Maharashtra. Soil erosion, recurring drought, floods and landslides affect biodiversity. People from rural areas migrate to urban areas in search of better livelihoods.

What is gaining momentum now are innovative initiatives taken by farmers, NGOs and scientists over the past decades that have laid the basis for a new agricultural paradigm. The central concept of this paradigm is resilience which has two aspects:

1. Ecological - coping with drought and climate change, and
2. Socio-political - the ability of farmers to develop their skills and voices to choose their development path.

Unfortunately, we live in a time of inequality in wealth, water and income-driven policies. This is visible in every sector- especially in water usage, whether for irrigation or domestic purpose. We see an unprecedented water transfer from the poor to the rich, from agriculture to industry, and from the village to the city. An analysis of water distribution shows that urban Maharashtra gets 400% more water than rural Maharashtra. About 53% of Maharashtra's water is consumed in 3 out of 36 districts: Mumbai, Nashik and Pune. All this water is drawn from the villages where the lakes are situated. In Ahmednagar District, even 75 years after independence, most tribal families do not have a piped water connection!

Maharashtra has been one of the perennially drought-hit states in India. However, same Maharashtra is home to the genesis of cooperative movements. It has a large area under sugarcane, which is a water-intensive crop. The big farmers and politicians own most. The strong caste and class divide sharpens the inequality in water control in Maharashtra. The two

per cent of sugarcane cultivators utilize 68% of irrigation water, cultivating just six per cent of land - highlighting the wealth inequality in the access to water.

Agriculture is the most significant sector with rising inequalities between the haves and the have-nots. Successive governments claim they have doubled agricultural credit. However, most of that goes to corporate agribusiness, and very little reaches the small farmers. Marginalized communities cannot cultivate their fields as they do not have the finances to dig a well or lay a pipeline from a nearby canal to their land. The local banks do not consider these farmers credit-worthy, and the only way out for their survival is migration. In this scenario, Fr. Hermann Bacher SJ, pioneer of the community-based watershed development movement in Maharashtra and his team at the *Social Centre, Ahmednagar*, played a crucial role in helping marginal farmers by standing guarantor so that the bank could provide them with interest-free loans. This brought tremendous change in Ahmednagar and the neighbouring districts. Thus, land once considered barren became fertile. This innovative idea brought positive transformation in the lives of many poor and marginal farmers and brought thousands of hectares of barren land under cultivation.

Original in English



Dispossession, Destruction, and Deliverance

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"I carry my home in a small backpack. This is my pillow...a blanket in this cold, moist sidewalk...In it, I froze shards of childhood memories, memories of joy...burnt pages of my schoolbooks...in it, I carry the bombed soil of my hometown.... With it, I ran across the jungle, climb to the piercing wire fence of the borders...sailed on the back of the dark water in disturbing seas, its strong ropes bridges my village and I...."

-Transcribed from Home Rides in Backpack, a poem written and read by Abdul Samad Haidari, a Hazara stuck in Indonesia for almost a decade, during the 40th anniversary of JRS in the Asia Pacific.

Abdul is one of the world's 84 M refugees. At eight years old, he fled Afghanistan, ranked third after Syria and Venezuela among countries with the highest number of forcibly displaced persons. His dearest possession in this asylum saga is a backpack that carries the "bombed soil of hometown". Conflict is the primary driver of forced displacement today and has forced 26.6 M persons to leave their homeland. When we look at our mindset of superiority over all other living beings, the history of colonization, the world wars and the current globalized violence, we realize why the refugee population continues to increase in this so-called modern and civilized day. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention was forged after a global conflict and failed annexation of lands. We are convinced that we are superior to the land and all in it.

It is essential to reflect on this disposition that land is to be possessed because, in every possession, there is consequent dispossession of lands taken away from others. Moreover, lands being owned are not only currently inhabited but also those unexplored. We now see this happen in lands and spaces beyond the planet. Such is our possessive and acquisitive behaviour.

Dispossession

Refugees are essentially people dispossessed – of their land, liberty and identity. Refugees move through other countries without protection and are at the mercy of human smugglers and traffickers. 2.3 M stateless people in the Asia Pacific region comprise 40% of the world's total. Among these, the Rohingyas from Myanmar are considered the most persecuted group in our world today, prompting Pope Francis to declare that the face of God today is Rohingya.

Violent power struggles, aggressive development paradigms, disrespect for indigenous cultures, and denial of how worsening natural disasters are linked to the climate crisis have caused large numbers to lose possession of their lands. In crisis areas like Afghanistan and Myanmar, unarmed civilians are squeezed into spaces that offer no stability, freedom and protection because no armed group respects their right to be free from violence and to exist in peace and exercise their liberty. The unarmed are powerless even as they continue to choose peace and solidarity.

This dispossession is demonstrated in how unwelcoming societies and borders push refugees. Thousands of refugees are refused or pushed back at the border of countries that could offer them safety and protection. In just a few days between Christmas and New Year, Thailand managed to push back 10,000 refugees from Myanmar fleeing the military junta's violent takeover in February 2021.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), though remaining in their country, are marginalized by their government. In the Islamic city of Marawi, Southern Philippines, about 360,000 persons (98% of the population) were displaced during a five-month destructive siege of the city occupied by pro-ISIS militias. Now in its fifth year, the rehabilitation efforts effectively left out the return of Ground Zero residents and have delayed compensation for the destruction of properties. Overlapping, competing claims over land and resources, and lack of meaningful participation of the displaced population are some serious issues that hinder the realization of government plans.

Dispossession is not only physical but also intellectual and technological. Dominant and often violent ideologies have controlled societies based on political thought, religious tenets, and economic and cultural beliefs. Those outside these ideological lines are shut off and forced to seek safety away from their countries. There is scarcely room in the global social forum to recognize, listen and value indigenous cultures. The mining industry has satellite and radar technology developed and accessible-to-a-few that can identify minerals and elements below land from machines floating in space. In these mineral's maps, what is seen onscreen are gleaming coded 3TGs (Tin, Tantalum, Tungsten and Gold) and other profitable metals. But there is no trace of living persons and thriving communities in these lands under speculation. While indigenous communities struggle and seek ways to improve their natural resources, the mining companies, often in connivance with armed groups, have already possessed these lands with their licenses and technology. They rob marginalized communities of the opportunity to improve their lives, live their culture, and determine their future.

Destruction

More than a decade ago, JRS helped island inhabitants of Carteret to move to the main island in Bougainville as their land was engulfed by rising sea levels destroying their food sources and livelihoods. JRS was assisting Pacific islanders in Tuvalu and Kiribati to face the challenge of addressing climate impacts. They don't fit the traditional refugee definition by the UN Refugee Convention as their displacement is not based on a fear of discrimination based on race, religion, nationality, political belief or social affiliation. Catholic social teaching offers a

broader understanding that embraces all people forced to migrate as de facto refugees understanding that the displacement is not their choice.

The pervasive economic model of growth and capital fuelling all extractive industries have weighed heavily on the carrying capacity of our planet. As environmental journalist Fred Pearce pointed out, 'what is causing climate change is not overpopulation but overconsumption.' The cry of the land, the poor and all of us are to prevent climate change. Yet, the collective anaemic response of responsible parties implies that while they recognize the house is on fire, that fire has not reached the part of the house where they are comfortably occupying.

Defending the land has led to communities' destruction and activists' death. Around 59% of the 358 human rights defenders killed in 2021 worked on the land, environmental and indigenous rights, confronting the economic interests of influential individuals and corporations involved in logging, mining and other extractive businesses. The year 2020 was the worst year on record, where 227 environmental activists were killed. According to Global Witness, Colombia, Mexico, and the Philippines were the top three countries with the highest number of documented activist murders. There are other subtle ways to cause slow-onset destruction, such as the actions of powerful nations on the Mekong River, where the ebb and flow of this river impacts the lives of millions of downstream communities aggravating their existing climate vulnerabilities and forced displacement.

Deliverance

There is a promise of deliverance. God's faithfulness to people in exile endures forever. These are some of the signs of God's promise for me.

1. **Pope Francis** is the universal Catholic Church's chief steward and inspiration in responding to the cry of the earth and the poor, the de-facto refugees.

In 2015, Pope Francis issued his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, on care for our common home. The encyclical letter provided a systematic frame for understanding the ecological crisis and how we all may respond from science and spirituality at the level of society and the individual self. *Laudato Si* strengthened the environmental movements by inspiring and working in harmony with many groups, especially faith groups, from the local to the global level. There is almost no area of discussion today that does not encompass the message of *Laudato Si*. The Synod of the Amazon has raised and addressed ecological issues.

The Migrants and Refugees Section, created under the Pope's direct guidance and discretion in the newly instituted Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in 2016, which merged various pontifical councils, is a clear sign of the Pope's strong advocacy of the plight of the refugees. The refugees in Lampedusa will forever value how the Pope chose to visit them on this island for his first pastoral trip outside Rome after the election.

The prophetic role of Pope Francis will endure in the inspiration of the faithful community in today's generation and the subsequent inspiring solidarity and dialogue even as, like Jesus, he will cut pure truth from falsity like a sword.

2. Global Compacts Promoting the Protection of Migrants and Refugees

It is widely acknowledged that the scope and criteria of the UN Refugee Convention for Refugees are limited and narrow; for example, a person must cross international borders to qualify as a refugee, and individual refugee status determination leads to family breakup. However, the process and consensus needed to extend the Refugee Convention and make it succeed like in 1951 is not a bright prospect today.

The Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration are the first intergovernmental agreements under the auspices of the UN assembly and may be considered the best global agreement alternative. The Vatican State has been an active interlocutor of both global processes issuing a guidance document for Church engagement called 20 Action Points for the Global Compacts.

Both global compacts offer international protection for migrants and refugees regardless of their status. They have expanded pathways towards third-country solutions and emphasised the importance of international cooperation in addressing people's movements. These are significant developments in a situation where third-country resettlement for refugees in 2020 is only 2%. However, brokerage and lack of supportive policies expose migrants to grave danger and vulnerability.

Migration has long been an adaptation strategy; however, it can only be a successful strategy if enabled by robust protection policies of cooperating countries. The Global Compact on Migration was ground-breaking as it was the first intergovernmental agreement that recognized environmental disasters as drivers of forced migration and called for the urgent protection of victims.

Protection policies must be shaped through the meaningful participation of refugees, and refugees must have representation on all platforms where their voices are heard. The Global Refugee Forum is a UN mechanism held every four years where member States and other actors review progress, address challenges, and make changes to achieve the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees.

There is still no binding agreement recognizing forced displacement due to climate change. However, a UN Human Right Council's landmark ruling recognises non-refoulement for those forced to flee their country to seek safety from the dangers of climate change.

Education for refugees is an emerging area in seeking complementary pathways. While there continue to be challenges around language proficiency, associated expenses and documentary requirements, the Education for All (EFA) policy provides a plausible path for refugees. In 2020, Sogang University, in partnership with UNHCR, provided fully paid undergraduate scholarships to refugees with the option of remaining in South Korea. The scholarship included a year of Korean language training.

3. Youth Leading the Future

Three stories stand out for me.

The first is about Van (not his real name), a Montagnard youth attending the Bangkok JRS urban education program. When he was eight, his parents told him and his younger sister that they would visit his grandmother that day. He ended up in Bangkok two weeks later, walking through the jungle without seeing his grandmother. Van's father is a Christian pastor who was earlier arrested by police along with Van's uncle. He escaped to Thailand from Viet Nam with his family after his brother died in police custody. The second story is about a father. Mr Nyi represented his Yangon district as a Member of Parliament of the National League of Democracy (NLD) party. He escaped soon after the military junta took power in Myanmar and was resettled to a third country seven months after the coup. In a text message, he lamented his situation, cleaning kitchen floors late in the evening for less than 10 dollars rendering his two graduate degrees from UK worthless where he is. He said that he is doing this for his two young children.

These refugee youth not only did not choose to be refugees but had no choice. Their future as refugees was decided for them. It makes one wonder where the youth draw their courage to change and face the future. The incredible resilience and creativity of youth can be seen everywhere. Van has completed basic language and digital skills training and is now learning more advanced skills. The children of Mr Nyi have attended international schools in Myanmar, and their adjustment to an English-speaking country is going well. May their father's love for their homeland inspire them to give back in service.

My third story is about Jason, a chieftain's son from Bukidnon. Jason was attending first grade in a culture-based school established in a remote upland indigenous community with the help of Pedro Walpole. After nearly two decades, I revisited Bendum and found Jason leading the youth in managing their forest and ancestral land. He spoke during the 20th UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues session and met Pope Francis in Rome. Jason is carrying the immense responsibility to care for the land and community on his back. What tremendous growth, an amazing grace that shaped Jason's leadership through the quiet years. Indeed, the future is full of hope; the youth are leading the future.

I will end this reflection on a personal note. Two years ago, I was bequeathed a piece of land that is now under my name. I possess this land. However, this situation is temporary. I know I will return to the land in God's time, for the land owns me.

Original in English



Walkers: A Cry from the Poor of the Earth

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Beginning in April 2022, as part of Holy Week, we, as a coordinating team for the hospitality dimension of the Latin American and Caribbean Jesuit Network with Migrants, have had the privilege to accompany a mission period with young people in the border region between Venezuela and Colombia. This has been an experience of an encounter between people from Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil who, rooted in the Ignatian spirituality of service and fraternity, are looking for ways to transform the reality of exclusion, discrimination and indifference faced by forced migrants in the territories through which they are made to walk.

These 17 days were dedicated to listening to the cries of people from Venezuela, whose flight sent them walking the roads across several countries, starting their journey in Colombia. The days were dedicated to learning about the response of these young volunteers, who go out to encounter, making an option to serve and transform society.

The cries of those forced into migration are being heard by young people who, from a culture of hospitality, choose to accompany the journeys of those suffering injustice. In this article, we present our testimony of hope.

1. Landless Walkers in our Common Home

When the walking people cross the imaginary border between Venezuela and Colombia, they have already paced the cities and towns of their nation in a steady mass exodus of men and women, young people, little girls and boys, entire families, and Indigenous peoples. This is a “flow” of landless people who make their way through different Latin American countries, fleeing violence and widespread poverty. These people represent the cry of those who, having lost everything, have nothing left but their own feet in their search for life.

Perhaps the word that best describes the condition of these walking people is “uprooted” since their relationship with the land – their own and the lands of others – is one of flight and permanent transit from one place to another. Their situation is like many others who seek international protection; they share the exact underlying causes behind forced migration, face the same protection gaps along the way, and cross “real borders of death.”

In “Laudato Si”, Pope Francis points out the profound contradiction faced by people forced to migrate to Latin America and the Caribbean and helps to understand why many of them are driven to “walk”. He says: “*The land of the southern poor is rich and mostly unpolluted, yet*

access to ownership of goods and resources for meeting vital needs is inhibited by a system of commercial relations and ownership which is structurally perverse.” (LS §52).

Today, millions of people throughout Latin America and the Caribbean go through this painful, existential experience as they undertake this journey to save their lives. Their fundamental rights go unprotected, and, for humanity, a question mark is drawn over the future of all people in this Common Home.

2. Accompanying Their Steps

Forced migrants, particularly those who migrate by foot, experience daily the true meaning of uncertainty; they know very well how to find hope within human tragedy. People forced to flee can be the teachers our humanity requires. Together, we can achieve something extraordinary: become more human and continue moving *towards an even better version of ourselves*. By walking *alongside the poor, those cast aside by the world, and those whose dignity has been violated in a mission of reconciliation and justice* (PAU 2), we will be able to build the future of hope we need.

In this shared perspective, as CPAL’s Network of Youth and Vocations and the Jesuit Network with Migrants, from April 1-17, 2022, we managed to facilitate this meeting between young volunteers from the Xavier Project in Venezuela and young people involved in community processes accompanied by JRS Colombia, with Jesuits in formation from Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela, and colleagues from JRS Venezuela, Colombia, JRS LAC and SJMR Brazil.

As part of the experience to feel/think/act, we went out to walk a few kilometres of the migration route, accompanying the steps of migrants walking along a motorway that was not designed for pedestrians, under the relentless sun and the deafening noise of cars passing at high speed. As we contemplated reality in the act of walking, we encountered God in our hearts and the hearts of every one of us, pilgrims for now; we felt the exuberant creation around us in the mountains stretching from here to the south of the continent.

For a moment, God walked alongside us: his name was Cleiver. He was wearing sandals and an improvised backpack. This was his second trip, and now his goal was to reach Peru. With a big smile, he shared the experience of his first trip and told us with joy *that “although the road is hard, the goal is achievable”*. With love, we said goodbye and held onto the bond that makes us human by opening ourselves to genuine and sincere encounters. God speaks through migrants and with love tells us: *“I do not wish this on anyone.”* With the same love, God affirms, through the words of those who go out to encounter him: *“this is a human person whom we must embrace with our hearts”*.

The question then arises around the meaning, theology, and social dimension of our actions for the liberation of humanity and its peoples. We know these people do not leave of their own volition; instead, they flee and walk as a last resort for themselves and their families. However, we also recognize that this is a wake-up call, an act of resistance, a pilgrimage, and even an aesthetic undertaking to say that these people are the blood that runs through *“the open veins of Latin America”* (Galeano) and that we are *“a people with severed legs but still walking”* (Calle 13).

This meeting of young people involved understanding the reality faced by local communities in the border region both in Venezuela and Colombia, reflecting on the possibilities for action from a volunteering perspective, and designing communication and public advocacy actions. In general, it was a moment of a shared journey between forced migrants seeking to recover their lives, young people choosing to give deep meaning to their existence, and professionals deciding to accompany the path of victims of exile. Jesuits go forth to radiate their spirituality, and local communities transform reality, rooted in solidarity and commitment to the common good.

It was a meeting of ‘walkers’ in our Common Home, coming together at the ‘border’ to recognize the humanity and act accordingly. From what we have experienced and felt, we continue to affirm—as various social movements and processes have done for many decades—that “our planet is under threat”. Our economic models are not sustainable and result in millions of human beings living in poverty, without access to land or livelihoods for themselves and their families, continuing to be driven to walk to stay alive. The Earth cries out in pain, the walking people cry in hunger, thirst and exhaustion, and their cry is a summons. It is an invitation for a radical change in our lives.

3. We Must Go One Step Beyond

The lives of these young people are a source of hope. The cry of the walking people is heard by young people worldwide, who mobilize to serve more, to give their lives to human encounters through volunteering. Young people are also on the move, embarking on a journey, “migrating” in a literal sense and a metaphorical sense; young people share this path, the fear of uncertainty and hope for the future. *They are looking for hope, imagining the extraordinary, mobilizing and opting for life; they are rooted in solidarity, creativity, and passion, in their vision of the world and their excitement for the future* (Inspiring Text for CPAL Volunteers).

“A love through humility and service that shirks personal honour and understands how to kneel at the feet of others to alleviate their fatigue, wash away the dirt and welcome them at the table.” This phrase by J.A Pagola, shared as an Easter Greeting by Solmary, one of the participants of this experience, perfectly describes the meaning behind these days of encounter, mission, formation, reflection and action. Holy Week has been the ideal setting for this experience of service and pilgrimage, contemplation in action, and encounter with life from the tragedy and pain of humanity—a true experience of “washing our feet,” worn out from the journey.

This humble love, expressed as the only natural way to take care of the Common Home, also bears witness to Father Pedro Arrupe’s invitation to live a “revolution of love”. In his view of the world and inspired by the JRS, this means welcoming and taking care of people who are forced to leave everything behind to seek refuge. Accompanying migrants, refugees and displaced persons along their paths is the central element of this volunteering experience. That is why going out to walk the migration route was such a meaningful exercise, to see, feel and accompany the steps of millions of people who are *forced to flee to start their lives anew*.

As Pope Francis tells us in *Fratelli Tutti*, fraternity and social friendship are the paths to building a better world amid this throwaway culture. He reminds us how “a stranger on the

road” can be the key to learning how to become better and more human. During these days of encounter, we have been ‘walkers’. We have chosen to ‘*go one step beyond*’, to look each other in the eyes and change the world through service and generous love, which trusts and cares for everyone and everything.

Thus, we will continue to affirm, alongside young people, that a *hopeful future can only be built* with the “discarded people of the world” and the walking people. Through their lives, God allows us to travel the path of peace in the culture of caring for everyone and everything.

These were days to connect with the decision to live in service, to serve through encounter and mutual care (“which is also civil and political” LS §231), promoting a more incredible culture of hospitality with an outlook of reconciliation and justice in our societies.

When we open ourselves to encounter the walking people, we learn that fraternity is a pathway of hope for humanity. From this part of Latin America and the Caribbean, we choose to ‘go one step beyond’ so that this incredible pain and suffering is not meaningless. Together with walking people and young people, we recognize that our shared mission in this *revolution of love* is to walk side-by-side in pursuit of utopia because, albeit unattainable, this is what keeps us moving forward. God is in every step we take.

The results of this experience can be seen in the local communities where the young volunteers shared their lives in mission or audio-visual pieces with testimonies and proposals for action created by them. However, the fruits of this encounter will mostly be reaped in the future, in the service of men and women who have chosen to live for others and with others. Thank God for their lives.

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