

DIAKONIA



JRS ASIA PACIFIC NEWSLETTER 2023 DECEMBER EDITION

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**“IT IS AN URGENT
CHALLENGE,
IT CANNOT BE POSTPONED,
IT CONCERNS EVERYONE.
LET US PROTECT
OUR COMMON HOME,”**

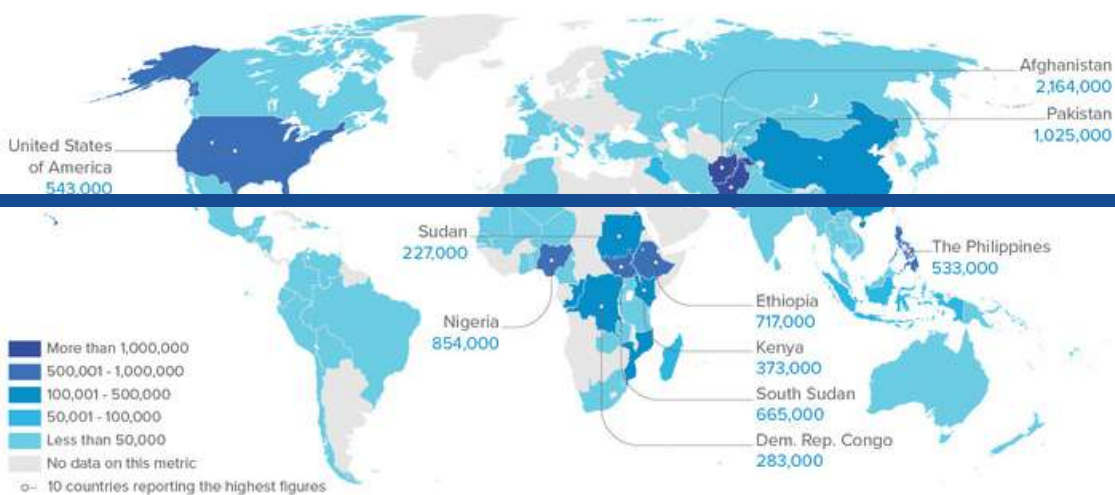
**POPE FRANCIS
23 MAY, 2023**

“In a time when many parts of the world are subjected to intense heat waves, floods and forest fires, on the 23rd of July Pope Francis invited world leaders to fight against climate change more actively.”

A NUMBER OF CONCERNS

8.7 million Internally displaced people because of disasters in 88 countries and territories

Total number of IDPs by disasters as of 31 December 2022



8.7 Million people living in displacement as a result of disasters in **88** countries and territories as of **31 December 2022**



According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2023, the total number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) at the end of 2022 is 71.1 million. 8.7 million Internally displaced people because of disasters in 88 countries and territories as of 31 December 2022. The record flashes a 45% Increase in the number of people internally displaced by disasters from 2021.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, in his call to address the rising seas and the climate crisis at the UN Security Council meeting in February this year, stressed that many low-lying communities and entire countries could disappear forever, leading to a "mass exodus of entire populations on a biblical scale" (UN Press 2023).

Diakonia



ASIA
PACIFIC

NEWSLETTER OF JRS ASIA PACIFIC 2023



CARE FOR OUR COMMON
HOME

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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

To Move or Not to Move

Vulnerable communities at high risk of displacement confront the dilemma of whether to move or not to move. Compounding the weight of this question are the variety and multi-layered drivers of displacement. In addition to conflict, climate change impacts have heightened the vulnerability of communities.

In 2022, there was a 45% increase of people internally displaced by disasters (IDRC) and about 84% of refugees and asylum seekers come from climate vulnerable countries (UNHCR). Sea level rise is a major risk in Southeast Asia where about 77% live in coastlines. According to a report in Nature Climate Change, the combined factors of internal climate variability and climate change increase sea level rise by 50%.

In fact, these trends say that to move or not to move is not anymore the question. Vulnerable communities in fringes of island and coastal communities, or marginalized urban population squeezed into tiny, risk-prone spaces must move. The question now is: how do we aid the successful resettlement of at-risk communities and how do we enable those that are unable to resettle? This is the challenge for policy makers, civil society and the vulnerable communities themselves.

In this Diakonia issue, we highlight these difficult challenges facing island and coastal communities in the region and their efforts to face the challenge in return. Through the five-year Research and Advocacy for Climate Policy and Action (RACPA) project we launched earlier this year with the generous support of Caritas Australia and in partnership with the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC) and the Institute for Social Research, Democracy, and Social Justice (Percik), we are accompanying three coastal and island communities in Indonesia and the Philippines as they navigate sea-level rise and other adverse impacts of human-induced climate change. Drawing on participatory research approaches, RACPA centers the local, living knowledge of these communities as they seek to cultivate resilience.



We have also featured the adaptive responses of upland, urban, island and coastal communities to climate change impacts through JRSAP and JCAP projects such as 40-4-40. Growing trees as their collective action to mitigate damage and promote care of their environment has paved the way for communities to strengthen their solidarity and care for their common home. In Indonesia, one coastal community is mitigating rob (king tide) by building a seawall of 4,000 mangrove trees. This campaign helped raise awareness, care and action from community members who are otherwise focused only on their daily material needs. In Cambodia, people from various religious persuasions draw from their shared faith in the sacredness of creation to nurture their environment and channel the grace for inner conversion.

With the communities we serve, our response is to move forward. These actions may be regarded as small ripples in a big ocean that is the climate crisis. However, we push onwards inspired by Pope Francis's exhortation in *Laudate Deum* that through these mindful cultural changes, "we are helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising from deep within society.... As a result, along with indispensable political decisions, we would be making progress along the way to genuine care for one another."

May we have a blessed Christmas and become a more caring world in 2024!

Louie Bacomo
 Director, JRS Asia Pacific
 December 2023



What has already been achieved?

Due to global warming, climate change,

increased displacement, mining, and burning practices, communities are losing their community forest, and scarcity of water has become a significant issue. Landslides or soil erosion, floods, water scarcity, and increased temperature are the climate crisis issues that people are facing.

JRS in contributing to Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) of the Society of Jesus and its own mandate, has promoted care for the environment, social cohesion, and youth empowerment,

in collaboration with the Jesuit Conference in Asia Pacific (JCAP), Committees on Reconciliation with Creation (RWC), and Indigenous Ministry (JCIM)

Together with youth and communities, JRS implemented a 40-4-40 tree plantation project from 2021 to 2023 with the objectives of enhancing community spirit in caring for the environment and helping reduce the effects of climate change through the collective tree plantation efforts of the community people. The project aims to increase cultural rootedness and strengthen marginal communities whose survival depends on the sustainability of their natural resources.

Growing Canopies, Strengthening Communities

Growing 40 thousand trees for



the 40th Anniversary of JRS

40

for

40

87.5% of trees are growing. Community forest maintenance committees were formed and with their lead, communities continue regular cleaning, replanting, and monitoring their trees every year.

As a result of the projects, communities are more aware of climate change, improve their motivation in caring for the environment, and become more willing to protect their environment by reforestation.

1 dollar for 1 tree has become an attractive incentive for the communities, especially during this challenging and critical situation. Through environment awareness sessions before the plantation activity and plantation activity itself, community members became more aware of global warming, and the benefits and importance of reserving the forests. Community spirit has increased at all levels of community members such as religious leaders, nuns, community leaders, adults, youth, and children actively participated in the activity.

The project has also strengthened the social cohesion of the community and the relationship between the host community members and displaced people.

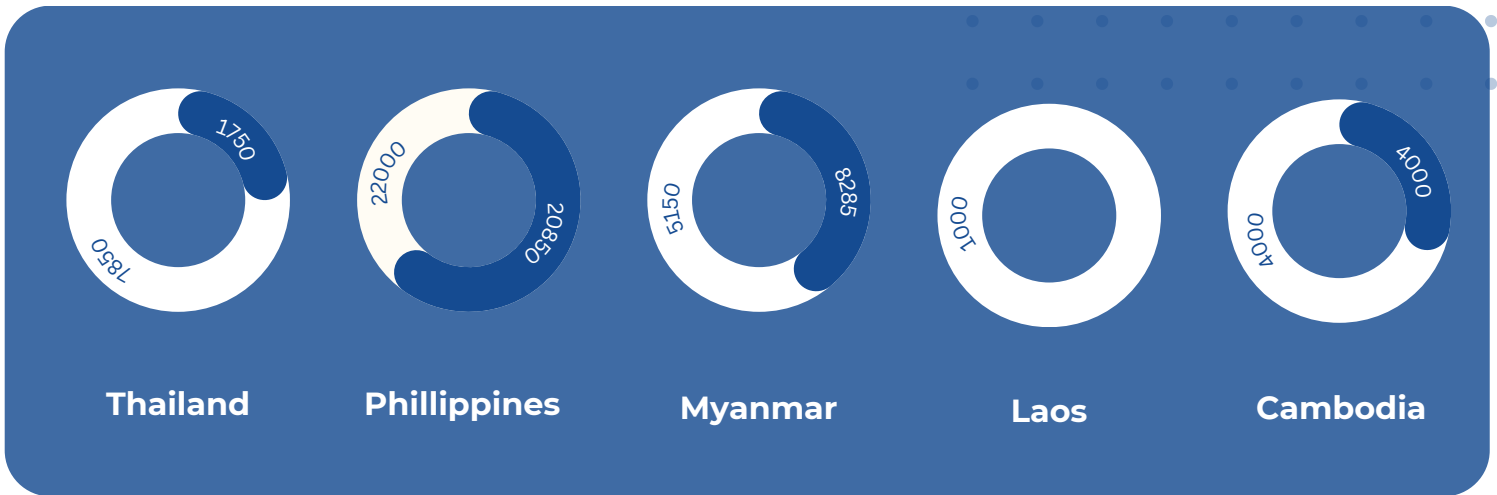
To mark the 40th anniversary of Jesuit Refugee Service, our partner communities in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand are growing 40 thousand trees to support and strengthen their social and ecological systems.

GROWING CANOPIES, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

The survival of these communities depend on the sustainability of their natural resources and cultural rootedness. Growing and protecting forests is a community endeavor, enhancing their ecological and social strength. We are called to an ecological conversion and live a life that respects and promotes integral ecology.

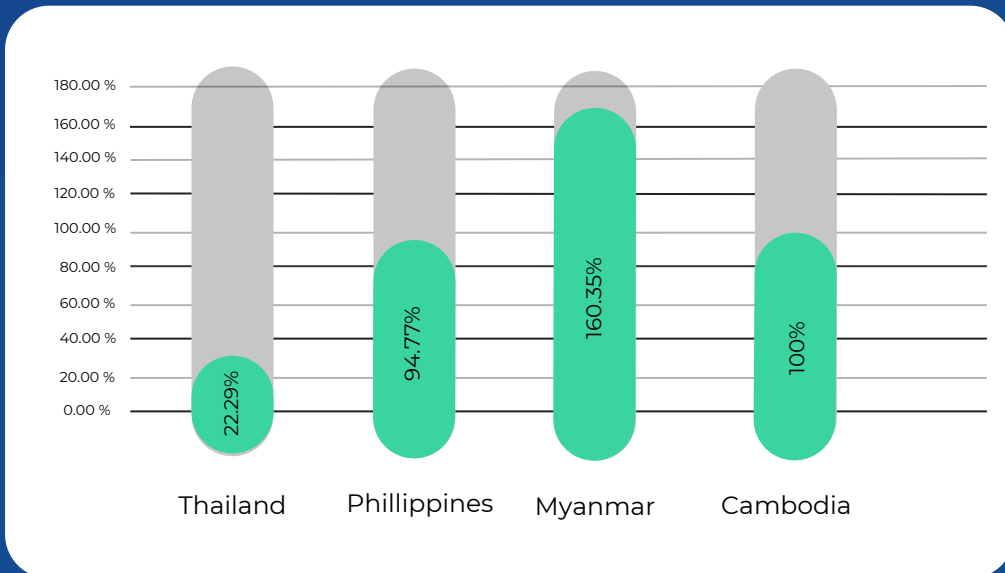


NUMBER OF TREES PLEDGED AND PLANTED PER COUNTRY



Pledged Trees
 Planted Trees

PLANTING PROGRESS BY 2023



Looking ahead, JCAP's Flagship Project will include a collective effort called Beyond 40-4-40 whose goal is to grow 100,000 trees and strengthening communities in five countries.



Where are we heading towards?

THE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FOR CLIMATE POLICY AND ACTION

is a five-year project in partnership with Caritas Australia, supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Launched in July 2023, the project focuses on adaptive responses of communities facing a high risk of internal displacement due to climate change and disasters, and the policy environment impacting their response.

It aims to help develop a deeper understanding and knowledge of climate change, vulnerability, and displacement among the different climate stakeholders, and contribute to strengthening the resilience of coastal and island communities through the development of a more enabling, inclusive, and collaborative policy environment to address the complexities of climate displacement. It also seeks to build the resilience of coastal and island communities vulnerable to climate displacement and help them make informed choices about their future.

Through RACPA,



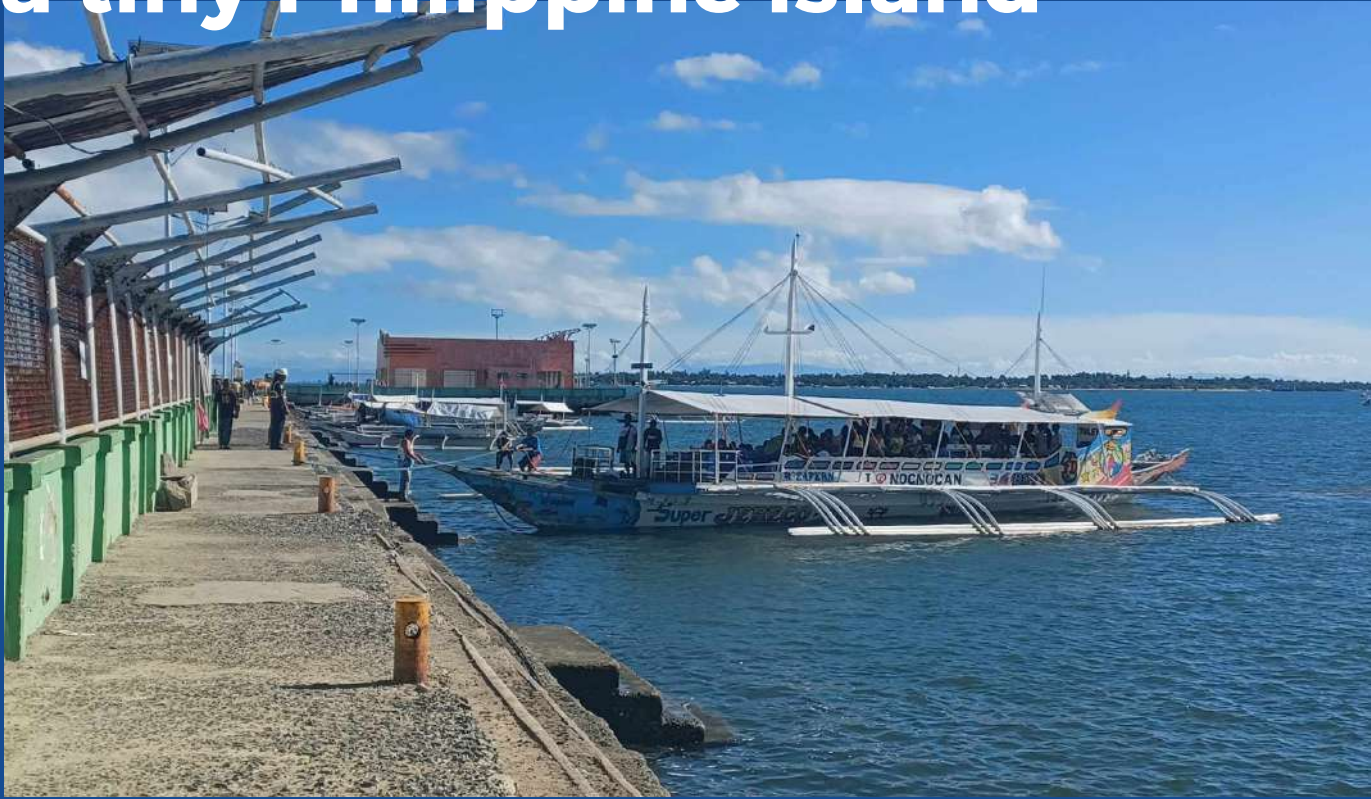
JRSAP is accompanying three communities as they navigate through climate and environmental change: Tambakrejo in Semarang Regency and Wonoagung in Demak Regency in Indonesia, and Nocnocan Island in Bohol Province in the Philippines. JRSAP's implementing partners are the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC) in the Philippines and the Institute for Social Research, Democracy, and Social Justice (Percik) in Indonesia.



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'I love Nocnocan': Finding the human face of loss and damage in a tiny Philippine island



The port of Talibon in Bohol is a hive of activity, with small pump boats clinging to the jetty. At nine o'clock, a large boat noses its way toward them. Easily accommodating 30 people, the boat named Super Jereco began plying the Nocnocan-Talibon route after Typhoon Rai, better known to locals as Typhoon Odette, hit the Philippines in December 2021. The Category 5 typhoon destroyed many of the small fishing boats that doubled as inter-island transport for the locals, and Super Jereco filled the gap. Passengers pay 50 pesos per head to be ferried a dozen or so kilometers each way.

On the side of the boat, in lettering that recalls a government tourism campaign, is the proud declaration: 'I love Nocnocan.' It could be one of those slogans emblazoned on tourist memorabilia the world over.

But Nocnocan is no tourist haunt. It is an island barangay where 2,000 people share less than 4 hectares of space.

To put this in perspective, four hectares is the floor area of SM Mall of Asia in Pasay City. Four hectares. That is the current estimate of Nocnocan Island's land area. What sea level rise would do to that figure remains to be seen, but projections are dire: A Climate Central map of sea level forecasts for 2050 shows around two-thirds of the island underwater. Mall of Asia has three stories. If predictions prove accurate, this island barangay will effectively be reduced to the equivalent of a single story of a giant shopping mall.

Off-grid living, without romance.



Water is a perennial problem, an irony for a community surrounded by a vast expanse of it. Their drinking water used to come from rainfall collected in hulking jars, but this has long since been replaced by purified water from refilling stations in the mainland. Every day, pump boats laden with empty 20-liter plastic water containers can be seen leaving the island and returning with their precious cargo, to be sold to the residents at 50 pesos per container, double what they would have cost in Talibon.

Rainwater, when the rains come, meets the households' other water needs. Old jars and large blue plastic barrels stand outside houses to collect runoff from the roofs, but the community now mainly relies on large tanks constructed and refurbished over the years through a series of government-funded projects. Fading billboards announcing the details of these public improvement works surround the covered court in front of the Nocnocan Multipurpose Building, where the main tanks are located.

Young men or boys could often be found engaged in spirited game of basketball in the court, but on a recent afternoon, there are only two people, a middle-aged man and a young girl collecting water from a pipe a few meters away from one of the basketball hoops. The low water level in the tank is unable to produce enough pressure to push the water through the pipe even though it is built close to the ground, so the residents have cut a hole in the ground and placed a basin there to catch the water, which is then scooped with a dipper into their containers.

Climate change is likely to exacerbate these problems. As people's water needs increase along with the heat, the same heat will lead to faster water evaporation even as irregular rainfall makes it harder to replenish the water stored in the tanks, jars, and barrels. Meanwhile, sea-level rise puts the stored rain water at greater risk of contamination by saltwater.

Electricity is another problem for the community. Following Odette, the National Power Corporation made photovoltaic solar home systems available. At a monthly fee of 220 pesos, each household can use two light sources and a charging station for electrical devices. Except for the few who could afford more expensive solar systems or diesel-powered generators, the limited power supply renders the use of washing machines, refrigerators, and electric fans, much less air-conditioning, out of the question.

To live in Nocnocan Island is to live off-grid, with none of the romantic connotations some people attach to the experience. How well the solar panels would hold up against another supertyphoon is a question everyone hopes would not be tested, but what happened during Typhoon Odette, when many of the houses on the island lost their roofs, does not inspire confidence.

THE LURE OF LIVELIHOOD

Almost two years have passed but signs of the damage wrought on the island by the supertyphoon remain visible. Several houses still stand in ruins. Not only did many houses lose their roofs, the flimsiest of them, with walls made of plywood and woven bamboo, were destroyed entirely. Most have been rebuilt, some with assistance from the church, which provided building materials and offered the labor of volunteers. But the houses in the areas deemed most risk-prone did not receive such assistance, to discourage them from rebuilding in these danger zones. Without the benefit of support, some rebuilt anyway, cobbling together haphazard shelters from bamboo, rusting tin sheets, and tarpaulin.



A number of these shelters stand on the northern side of the island, hidden from view from boats coming in from the mainland. Due to the movement of sea currents, this is where debris is deposited, and large volumes of marine litter were dumped here by Typhoon Odette. Lacking solid waste management facilities, the residents, too, have made the area a sort of landfill. The makeshift shelters rise on stilts above this patchwork of garbage. In one area, coral rock had been gathered into a tall pyramid resembling a cairn. You wonder what or whose memory is being honored until you see the tangle of plastic trash on top.

The residents of Nocnocan Island probably produce less waste than the average Filipino and far less than the average resident of the Global North, but the island's small size and location make it harder for the community to externalize what waste they produce, as most communities tend to do. There is no question of sequestering their trash in distant landfills because transporting them back to the mainland is a costly operation.





The garbage mars one of the features that make Nocnocan Island special: the coral reef on which the island rests, which belongs to Danajon Bank, said to be one of only six double barrier reefs in the world. This geological formation makes the area a rich fishing ground and explains why the residents insist on staying in spite of the island's many problems. Fishing is the community's main source of livelihood and such good fishing is difficult to find elsewhere. The residents estimate that the island's fishermen bring in from 600 kilos to a ton of catch per day.

How long this bounty can be sustained is uncertain. It is too early to tell how climate change will impact Danajon Bank, but coral bleaching that comes with warmer seas have been observed elsewhere by marine scientists, for instance, in Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Even now, in Danajon Bank, fish stock already seems to be declining, though this is likely due to overfishing. Some of the fishermen have had to resort to compressor fishing, a highly risky enterprise—and technically, illegal—because of the declining catch with pamukot (purse seine) or panggal (fish traps) fishing. Men from the island have died from the practice, but it is a gamble they take for their families. For these fishermen, many of whom had limited formal schooling, fishing is the only skill they know to make a living, the sea the sole workplace they could imagine.



ONE OF THE QUESTIONS
RACPA HOPES TO ANSWER IS

**“WHAT HAPPENS
WHEN
INDIVIDUALS,
HOUSEHOLDS,
AND
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MUST RELOCATE,
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CLIMATE AND
ENVIRONMENTAL
CHANGE?”**

PLANTING FISH IN THE WRONG SEASON: CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE IN CENTRAL JAVA

One of the things RACPA hopes to find out is what happens when individuals, households and communities must relocate, or be relocated, because of climate and environmental change?

A fishing village in Tambakrejo in Semarang Regency could help provide answers. The villagers were displaced by the “normalization” project that aimed to dredge built-up sediment in the East Flood Canal to reduce the impact of flooding. Initially, the community was left to fend for themselves: staying with relatives, seeking shelter in makeshift homes beneath a bridge. Eventually, with the help of civil society groups, they secured assistance from the government, which relocated them not far from the original settlement. Free housing was provided for 97 households, but only for a period of five years. Already, two years have elapsed since then.

Every year, usually from December to March, the sea level rises more than a meter, flooding the village. The fishermen face changes in the seawater’s behavior. When the tides rise, they avoid going out to fish or simply stay near the coast, as it is too dangerous. At such times, they lose even the 100,000 Rupiah (around 6 dollars) to make on average each day.



From planting rice to planting fish

In Wonoagung village in neighboring Demak Regency, the villagers get the fish that sustain their livelihood from fish ponds, not the sea. This has not always been the case. This used to be a farming village, until seawater encroachment from the regular flooding forced the villagers to turn from planting rice to “planting fish.” They cultivated milkfish as well as shrimp, which fetched good prices, enabling them to weather the financial crisis in the late 1990s. Back then, they made enough that they could meet their needs and still have fish left in the ponds for others to enjoy, free.

Unfortunately, the harvest failed as their shrimp stock was affected by a fungal disease linked to polluted waters. Later, global shrimp prices declined as well, prompting them to adapt yet again, importing a new shrimp variety from the United States—vannamei or Whiteleg—in the hope of better returns. It has been three years since they made the shift, and they are hoping the conditions will recover.

Meanwhile, flooding continues to plague the village, and it seems to be getting worse. Every year, around December to February, the community finds itself inundated. The water rises up to 40 centimeters (about 1.31 ft) in a house. The fish and shrimp escape from the fishponds, and the water brings skin diseases. Children find it hard to go to school since roads are flooded, even though the school itself is built on higher ground.





“ Mangrove project in Indonesia aims to turn the tide on sea-level rise

The allure of technology can lead to fixation on “innovative” solutions to climate and environmental problems. But in many cases, it is difficult to improve on what nature has created: While human-designed carbon capture and storage technologies remain nascent, hobbled by high cost of operation, trees and forests have been performing the same work for eons at minimal cost. Mangroves are especially effective in this regard, and coastal wetland protection and restoration, which includes mangroves, was cited as Solution #52 in Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming edited by Paul Hawken.

In Indonesia, this old-fashioned solution is being revived and promoted through the Mangrove Forest (*Rhizophora Mucronata*) Reforestation project along the sea belt of the coastal area of Tambak Lorok, Semarang in Central Java using the One Family One Mangrove approach. With the support of JRS USA and JCAP’s 40-4-40 project, JRS Indonesia has been working on the project with the local organization Lembaga Pendamping Usaha Buruh Tani Nelayan Keskupan Agung Semarang (LPUBTN KAS) since September 2023. For the first phase of the project, 2,500 mangrove seedlings have been distributed for planting.

Tambak Lorok is one of the areas in Semarang that experiences regular tidal flooding. Various factors are blamed for the flooding, including land subsidence due to groundwater extraction and sea-level rise, and the government is hoping its sea belt project would help address the problem. The mangrove project adds a green component to the gray of the sea belt infrastructure. Aside from sequestering carbon, it is expected to serve as a buffer against the rising tides.

The key elements of the project is community accompaniment through education and raising awareness of the local community in the surrounding area. Participants are assisted to develop a better understanding about the benefits of wetland ecosystems, the importance of preserving and restoring them, and the role of mangroves in their restoration. Learning from past experiences wherein mangroves planted were destroyed by infrastructure works, the project in Tambak Lorok has also modified the planting sites, focusing on safer areas.

“I was impressed by the participatory and collaborative values that animate this mangrove forest reforestation project,” said Fr Martinus Dam Febrianto, Director of JRS Indonesia. “There is JRS which has initiated attention to the threat of forced displacement due to climate change and environmental damage. There is LPUBTN which accompanies residents every day. And, of course, the assisted residents, namely the residents of RW 15 Tambak Lorok. Everyone is responsible for ensuring that mangrove seedlings can grow, initially in the narrow yards of people's houses, and then on the shorelines, which will allow these trees to grow large and restore the coastal ecosystem.”

The importance of mangroves in addressing climate and environmental change is further shown by their inclusion in the UNFCCC agenda. At COP27, the Mangrove Breakthrough initiative was launched as part of the Sharm El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda. At COP28 in Dubai this year, the Mangrove Breakthrough Financial Roadmap was issued, with the aim of unlocking around \$4 billion in investment by 2030 for “mangrove-positive” projects. That breakthrough might yet happen. Until then, the residents of Tambak Lorok are doing their own small bit, with a little help from JRS.



“Caring for our common home in Cambodia



2023 has been an exciting year for “caring for our common home” in JRS Cambodia. Banners carrying the message of Pope Francis have been displayed to more than 5000 visitors to our Mindol Metta Karuna Centre. Here also we have continued our composting and waste disposal practices, as well as installing more renewable energy powered lights. People with disability and other vulnerable families have been trained with more environmentally friendly home gardening and agriculture practise including hydroponic system and organic fertilizers.

In May and June, 8 students from Boston College with some faculty came for a three weeks practical research on plastic and waste disposal gardening practices and river/lake protection. This culminated in a wonderful ceremony with our Bishop Kike Figaredo, many Jesuit Priests and Buddhist monks and the surrounding villagers. A special tree in our green and beautiful grounds was “ordained” as a sign of protection for the forests and we planted more forest trees in our own meditation grove.

We also network with other groups especially Jesuit Service Cambodia, conduct special days with high school students including Xavier, a Jesuit School in Cambodia where youths are encouraged to get a global view of justice issue and see links between environment, displacement and poverty.

Father Jub, an JRS AP member since 1985 has established “Harmony in the Forest” in Preah Vihear Province and we have participated in that and brought groups there. Many JRS team members have set up their own sustainable eco-friendly home gardens and a special place has been reserved for and experimental garden in Metta Karuna. As well a new Labyrinth has been planted where guests can walk prayerfully in gratitude for the gift of Creation.

JRS Asia Pacific

WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE TO

our JRS family and friends as we continue our mission to accompany, serve, and advocate for all forcibly displaced peoples.



SUPPORT OUR MISSION



SCAN TO DONATE





**MAY THE PRINCE OF PEACE
BE OUR LIGHT
OUR CONSOLATION AND OUR HOPE
AS WE CELEBRATE HIS COMING INTO
OUR BROKEN WORLD**

2023