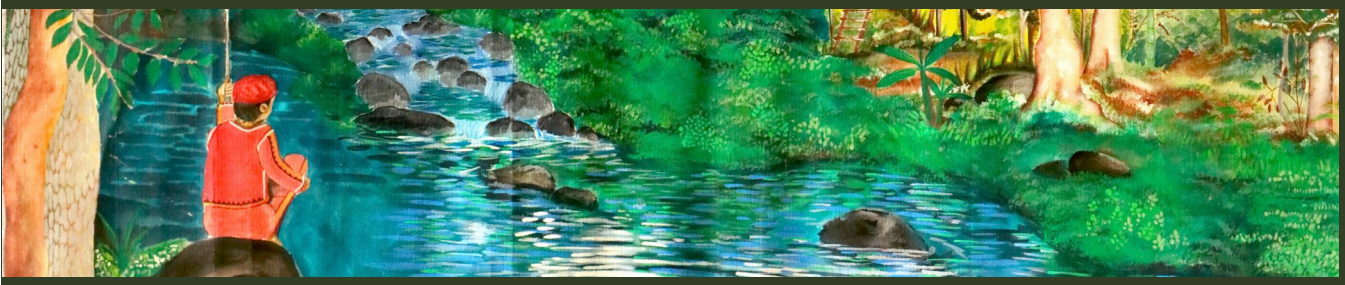
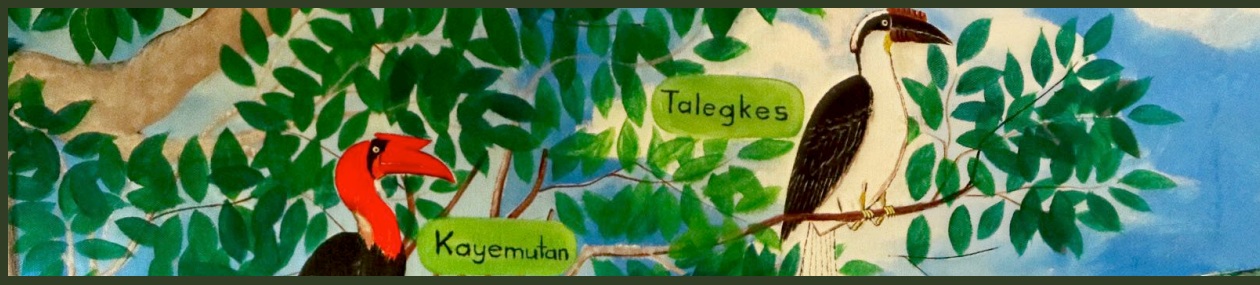




Indigenous Peoples and Laudato Si'

ABOUT BALAY LAUDATO SI'

Balay Laudato Si' is a culture and ecology center established in 2017 with the indigenous Pulangiyēn community and is built on the joint commitment to culture-based education and the forest and water management of the *gaup* or ancestral domain. Located in the Pangamu area of the Upper Pulangi watershed in Bendum, Bukidnon in northern Mindanao, Philippines, Balay Laudato Si' offers a space and time for those who want to experience deeper quality reflections and actions towards integral ecology. Local, regional, and international groups are welcome to visit and feel the peace and vitality of the place, understand the local context, and find occasions to engage with communities and youth. Balay Laudato Si' is the main platform for initiating a process of accompaniment that strengthens local networking and deepens the responses to the broad calls for action of Laudato Si'.

Balay Laudato Si' is managed and operated by staff of Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC) in collaboration with Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, JCAP-Reconciliation with Creation, and Ecojesuit. For inquiries and other information, please email **balaylaudatosi@gmail.com**.

BENDUM CADT AND ADSDPP

On 27 June 2018, the Bukidnon-Pulangiyen community received their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The CADT (R10-MLY-0110-152) covers 1,662.35 hectares of ancestral land.

The community was awarded a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) for 2,926.5 hectares on 4 June 1998 by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, at that time the government agency officially tasked to do so. The preparations for applying for a conversion to a CADT started in 2004, and after submission of all documentary requirements in 2005, the NCIP granted the petition of the Bukidnon-Pulangiyen indigenous cultural community on 27 January 2010 and directed the NCIP Ancestral Domains Office to prepare the CADT.

The development of the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) is presently ongoing and is intended to strengthen the Pulangiyen community's gaup management, in a context of culture-based education and the community awareness and achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. ESSC works alongside and accompanies the government-registered Nabantaw Bukidnon Pulangiyen Organization in formulating the ADSDPP. The plan focuses on elementary and high school education, health (clean water and food security), and youth accompaniment and capacity building in forest protection and regeneration, in exploring sustainable eco-agricultural practices, and sustaining the upland youth training development program (*Hulas*).

ABOUT APC

The Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) is a community-based, Jesuit-supported organization that sustains culture-based education in the uplands of Bukidnon in northern Mindanao, Philippines. Its **K-12 Basic Education program** provides multi-lingual, culture-based education for indigenous youth. Curriculum development in APC schools integrates community and land concerns, and the output is called a culture-based curriculum, one that integrates traditional knowledge and practice and responds to the growing needs of the community. Youth who wish to study in the APC school in Bendum, whose homes are a four-hour to a day's walk away, stay in the **dalēpaan**, where they share in activities and in relationships with other youth who come from different indigenous groups in the area. Some of the teachers and staff also stay and serve as older brothers and sisters who supervise and care for the children and youth in their home away from home.

Forest, Farm, and Leadership at the Margins (FFLM) is a unit that offers a cluster of training courses designed for youth who are unable to take part in the high school but aspire to develop their technical competencies and sense of identity and leadership. Guided by the cultural tradition of *Tuen hu Uyag* (Learning by Living and Doing), the goal of FFLM is to capacitate the youth to go beyond gaining technical capacity, and to strengthen their sense of responsibility and leadership towards the well-being of their community and the management of their land.

1 The Story of Laudato Si' in Bendum
An Introduction

For indigenous communities, social and environmental concerns are always one and the same crisis. It is only in an urban context or professional frame of mind that these sometimes get separated. As indigenous rural communities live on the land for generations, they are immediately connected to the consequences of change. Even if some action may in the short term be economically for the better, people weigh up if the path to be taken is going to damage the land and are immediately informed by their knowledge of effects. A purely economic based choice is not made unless they feel that no other choice is possible.

The community in Bendum started to reflect and discuss Laudato Si' as an indigenous community and sought to express what they found as supportive of their life and relations. Learning how to work through a 70-page document was a challenge! What is shared here is the people's understanding of the document's message and its inherent process, and to work with it to arrive where they need to be, so as to act on different challenges.

This community discussion and reflection shares five "stories" or occasions for reflection. **This introduction becomes the first "story".** It is simply an account of how the community came together and had a series of reflections knowing their own ancestral lands and seeking to understand what others were sharing of consequence.

The **second "story"** is an explanation of the letter of Pope Francis and its importance in a cultural context, of care and solidarity. It is a story of surprise that, coming from the global context, someone can share something so familiar with the local context that it is as if that person has been in the community for a long time. That is what Pope Francis did when he spoke of the importance and connectivity of culture. Eight very insightful and inspiring paragraphs were found in Laudato Si' that became the focus of community discussion.

The third "story" is what one community wants to share with others as everyone builds together a response of gratitude and responsibility for creation—until the seventh generation.

Fourth is the "story" of commitments: commitments in the making to care for the forest and water and all that these sustain. There are commitments to a cultural education, incomplete and open to the future sharing hope and respect. And then there are commitments for solidarity in the broader valley and also the world at large. This is especially important to share with other indigenous communities the integrity of their way of life and care for land and oceans where all life should be able to flourish.

The fifth "story" is prophecy: prophecy of today, the threats, opportunities and hopes that need greater voice and empowerment so the world may change and be inclusive of all.

Mercy Pakiwag and Jason Menaling are the key community members working in APC who facilitated the dialogue in Balay Laudato Si', Bendum, 2018.

We encourage everyone to find their own "stories" that our paths may meet... Laudato si' me Senior...

2 Learning and Teaching Laudato Si' in a Cultural Context

Laudato Si' affirms that "our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God." (LS 119) This resonates with how the Pulangiyen of Bukidnon view their environment as living relations rooted in their belief in *Migtanghaga*, the Creator. The respect for these relations is expressed in how the community shares and manages the land and water, as well as in its rituals and the arts. This tradition of engaging with the land and with others is what sustains their commitment to *nalandangan*, the peace covenant that has always been the center of their culture's identity as people of peace.

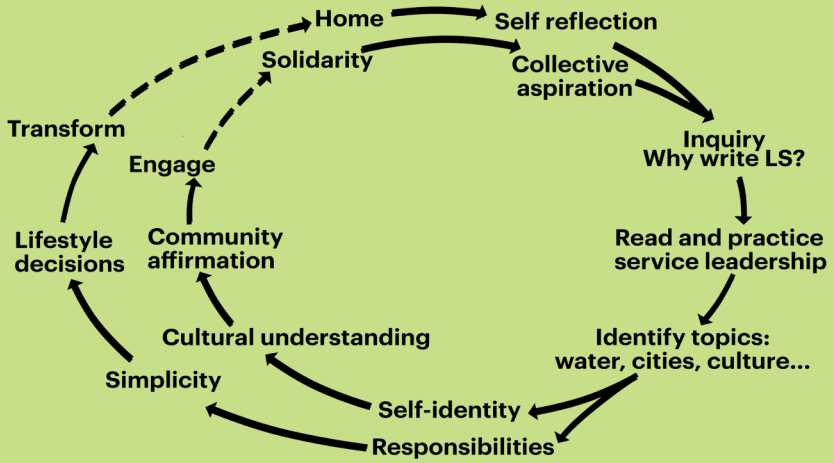
Laudato Si': On Care of our Common Home is an encyclical or letter written by Pope Francis where he talks of the ecological challenges mankind has created and calls for urgent action to protect the planet and people. While Laudato Si' is grounded on Catholic teachings, the message is addressed to all people at all levels – personal to institutional, and local to global. Most notably, Laudato Si' emphasizes the role of Indigenous Peoples in making a difference in how we all manage our resources by "instilling a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land." (LS 179) Indigenous Peoples are concerned with what they will eventually leave to their children and grandchildren. These indigenous values are highly instrumental in how we form our decisions and how we relate to others in a way that does not harm the land and water.

For indigenous communities, they experience ecological crisis and understand the impact in their landscape.

In Mindanao, the ways of life of these communities are threatened by extensive land use change, infrastructure and mining that affect the land, livelihood, and health and even the rights of the people. In Laudato Si' the ecological crises on a global scale are presented through unifying themes that include pollution and climate change, the issues of water, and loss of biodiversity. It describes how these environmental concerns are one with the social concerns affecting the lives of people, especially the poor and vulnerable. These challenges are part of the reality for many, if not all Indigenous Peoples around the world.

Lines of approach and actions are presented in the letter. Dialogues at different levels are identified as key in advancing one world with a common plan. Ecological conversion requires collaboration from every individual and institution. The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion (LS 219). Indigenous communities are called to take a major part in a "new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all." (LS 14)

MESSAGE OF LAUDATO SI'



1. Laudato Si' is a message to the whole world about care for our **common home** and the need for a **new and universal solidarity.**

2. Changes in our environment are of great consequence for humanity, fostering both **self-reflection and collective aspirations and actions.** *Share about the content of what students could learn. The document can be approached in different ways.*

3. Just understanding **why** the document is written is an interesting **inquiry** and discussion with the youth.

4. This is a quality document that can be **read and practiced** certainly in the context of a school community promoting a sense of **service leadership.**

5. We in APC have used it in different ways, identifying a **topic** like **water, cities, or culture** for discussion and strengthening our basis for questioning what needs to be done for a more stable world.

6. Finding, for example, the **eight references to culture** have challenged us in our own unique context to reflect on our own **identity and values** and better understand our **responsibilities.** *Discuss new ways for students to learn and engage with ideas and people.*

7. The experience has challenged our own **cultural understanding and role** in society and the different ways of communication. The **simplicity** of our lives can be seen as a value rather than a hindrance.

8. We have used it as a reference to understand the ancestral domain and gained **affirmation for the work** in assisted natural regeneration the high school students are involved in. It faces us with many **lifestyle** questions as people leave for the cities and abroad as to what we want and what we need.

9. We hope to use this as a basis **to engage other students** in the summer who come to visit our place and so we can realize together that we have much in common, seeking to **transform** also society's need to respect and sustain the ecological services that give us a balanced environment.

2.1 Culture and Laudato Si'

Laudato Si' specifically speaks of culture and of its important contribution eight times during the document. Communities and the living practice and life of a culture are challenged to envision anew in these times how they can contribute to a better world. This is enabled, first, from the cultural wisdom and spirituality that enables a community to be at peace on the land and strengthened by its intergenerational relations and understanding of the common good. These are so often expressed through different cultural practices and the care and welcome of visitors. The references to culture in Laudato Si' are:

1. All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents. (14)

2. (T)he deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest". For example, the depletion of fishing reserves especially hurts small fishing communities without the means to replace those resources; water pollution particularly affects the poor who cannot buy bottled water; and rises in the sea level mainly affect impoverished coastal populations who have nowhere else to go. (48)

3. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (139)

4. More specifically, it calls for greater attention to local cultures when studying environmental problems, favouring a dialogue between scientific-technical language and the language of the people. Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, and above all, a living, dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment. (143)

5. There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes a historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture. Nor can the notion of the quality of life be imposed from without, for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each human group. (144)

6. Many intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community. The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems. (145)

7. It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, 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. (146)

8. Local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. They are also concerned about what they will eventually leave to their children and grandchildren. These values are deeply rooted in indigenous peoples. (179)

Environmental spirituality is where the natural environment is experienced as a spiritual source motivating our commitment and fostering our celebration of life and capacity for hope. We may want to pause and find a place, time and context where we can reflect and feel all that is given to us. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the lands on which we stand and pay respect to their Elders past and present.

We express our gratitude for their love and care of the land and all life and take up the responsibiity for greater reconciliation that is a need today by being part of a community and supporting the coming generations in their efforts for sustainability and integrity.

Laudato Si' speaks of community

"Self-improvement...will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today.

Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom...and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness.

Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds...

The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion." (219)

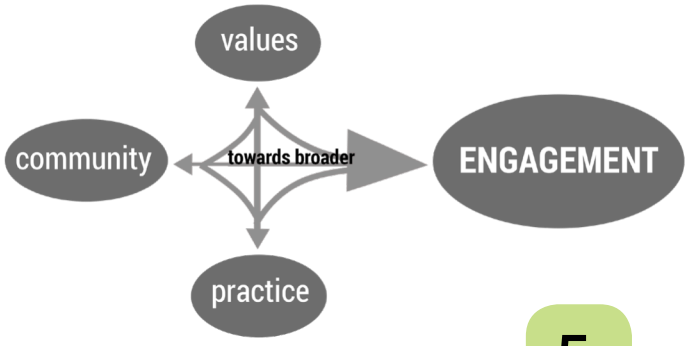
"In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters." (158)

We are called to connect our lifestyle and community with our environment and planet. Learnings are greater when we participate in joint action.

Communities of Practice and of Justice, and the Common Good

Today, there is much appreciation for the contribution made by communities of practice and communities of justice. This is where people share in a domain of common interests and values a sense of what a community is and broader social commitment. The challenge for communities today is to dare to envision the world by:

- Promoting values and principles that we can live by
- Seeking greater sustainability in all our practices
- Inviting others to share
- Calling for a deeper listening and response
- Addressing youth insecurities and social vulnerability
- Being free from fear and seeking dignity and peace
- Healing the landscape



3 Laudato Si' and Indigenous Peoples: A Reflection

As indigenous peoples of Bendum, Bukidnon, Mindanao, we celebrate Laudato Si' throughout each year. We have reflected on the passages of Laudato Si' and what it means in our lives. We have focused on six points that we think you can also relate to. These are our stories and we encourage you to pray, reflect and write your own stories.

1. Gratitude for the land and oceans

At 4 in the morning, the Pulangiyen people in the uplands of Bukidnon are already preparing for another long day in the farm. At the beginning of the planting season, the elders gather and hold *panalabugta*, a ritual that expresses gratitude to *Migtanghaga* the Creator, for the land that sustains their lives.

Bendum community map

Meanwhile, the children play in the Pulangi River, recognizing our identity is drawn from the river our ancestors have named. We are enveloped by cloud forest of Pantadon Mountain Range, crucial in sustaining local water cycle. In our context, the oceans are our source of monsoon rains and typhoons, which hold significant influence for our agricultural activities and way of living at other times of the year.

The foundation of our cultural identity is our relationship with the land. We have a deep respect for *gaup*, our ancestral land through which living relations facilitate balanced interactions between the needs of the community and the sustainability of the environment.

We know our forests and waters. We may not know all the scientific names of the plant species but we can tell why each one is important to the ecosystem and in our lives. Our traditional knowledge of the land is what helps protect the forests and waters that provide ecological services for many rural communities in Northern Mindanao and, following the river, going south and west across the island of Mindanao.

Laudato Si' affirms the need for greater attention to local cultures in studying environmental concerns. Participation of local cultures is important in balancing the dialogue with scientific and technical sectors. "Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, and above all, a living, dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment." (LS 143)

Today, the youth are taking the lead in our efforts to manage the natural resources in our *gaup* through education and leadership. We continue to learn by combining our traditional knowledge and values with science where we understand environmental challenges not only from within our landscape but also on the planetary scale. Part of our efforts also include dialogues with different groups from local to regional to determine how we can work together towards transformative action. As indigenous peoples of Mindanao, we hope for a broader recognition of the role we are playing in responding to the interconnected concerns of our society.

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2. Reconciling with the challenges we are facing

Indigenous communities have not always influenced how the world is shaped. The economic model of development has meant limitations and in many cases directly destroys the roles and rights of indigenous communities. We have to work for a very different future for the whole world. We seek to reconcile our way for responding to the socio-economic realities that often push us further to the edge of societies with our inherent cultural values that emphasizes our integral relationship with Creation.

"The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable on the planet: Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest." (LS 48) Traditionally, we rely on the climate pattern as the indicator of the beginning of the planting season. However in recent years, extreme heat and rain change erratically and give us a false start which affects not only our farming productivity but also the vegetation and ecological stability of our land. These seasonal shifts are how we know the climate is changing drastically.

From this dynamic some people turn to industrial or corporate agriculture in the hopes of attaining financial security and often, for mere survival. But in many cases for marginalized communities like us, corporate agriculture cultivates more trouble than it's worth. It leaves us more vulnerable to land rights abuses and trapped in a cycle of financial control through loans and debts.

Further, the impact of chemical use in corporate agriculture on our soils and waters and consequently to our food security is immense and difficult to reverse. Unless major changes take place, the quality of life for indigenous communities will continue to deteriorate.

We experience firsthand the consequences of society's steps in the wrong direction but at the same time, we strive to live in harmony with all others around us, always seeking pathways for solidarity. For this reason, our stories need to be heard.

3. Listen, because together we stand a better chance

The world is now partly willing to listen to and include vulnerable communities in framing the next steps for the planet and people. To empower the Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized communities in the process, there is a need to realize and acknowledge that we are not merely victims of social injustice but are people with integrity who have an urgency in wanting to express who we are and how we act.

This resonates with the statement by the bishops of Southern Africa mentioned in Laudato Si', "Everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation."

All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents. (LS 14)

The Pulangiyen people are people of peace. We are unique amongst the upland indigenous communities for our practice of *pulang*, which literally means to 'stay awake'. Parties involved in a conflict will hold a dialogue with the Tribal Council and will not sleep until they come to a peaceful resolution. Peace is central to our identity as an indigenous community. It is manifested in how we educate our youth and how we manage our land. This is also the foundation of our way of relating to other within and beyond our community.

Every culture has its own uniqueness. Although we are facing many limitations in our lives, we have many things to contribute in creating solutions to the interconnected challenges of our time.

The broader society needs to evaluate how they empower and capacitate Indigenous Peoples to be included in the process of finding sustainable ways forward. We stand a better chance at realizing the future we want if everyone participates and takes action.

4. Responding to the need for a sustainable and hopeful world

Laudato Si' has given greater meaning to 'environment' as a relationship between nature and society. It also recognized that we are not facing two separate crises, one environmental and one social, but rather with one complex crisis, which is both social and environmental. (LS 139) Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

In Bendum, we are primarily responding to this crisis through culture-based education and the management of our forest and water. Quality education

Kinder Class in APC

for Indigenous Peoples means that instruction and curricula are culturally and linguistically relevant to us. In Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC), students begin to learn using their mother tongue and the context of learning always starts from what we have in our culture. When the students go home, their parents can take part in the learning process of their children because they can connect through language and context. While other languages are learned, a culture-based approach in education maintains and strengthens the ties between parents and their children.

The management of our *gaup* or ancestral domain is central in strengthening the sense of solidarity in our community. The Tribal Council established the *balaud para hu kalasan* (forest policy) to regulate and monitor use of forest and water ecological services. Today, the youth are spearheading the management of the *gaup* through assisted natural regeneration while also fostering the culture of *pagpangamangel* or leadership in the process.

5. Identity and belongingness as persons and as community

Laudato Si' states that "many intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community." (LS 145)

The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems. We need a change in the economic system to one that allows full cycle production and inclusive and just participation.

Bendum had a tumultuous history of logging in the past. It significantly changed both the ecological and social landscape in our arena. We lost a great portion of our forest mostly to logging companies but also to the migrants who came to the uplands from Visayas to work as loggers and who bought many of our ancestral lands so they could resettle. We were forced to move further up in the mountains. Access to basic services became even more difficult. At the same time, we were faced with the increasing influence from mainstream society that was not always respectful towards our indigenous way of living.

We recognized these threats not only to our natural resources but also to our cultural identity. We envisioned a future where our children are educated, compassionate and proud of their identity as Pulangiyen. From this vision, we draw the values of *Tuen hu Uyag*, Learning by Living and Doing. This is an integrated approach to education and formation, especially for the youth who strive to attain national learning standards while strengthening their roles in the sustainability of their land and culture.

Three decades later since the logging years, our youth in Bendum have assisted the regeneration of our forest. If you walk with us to the forest, we can point you to a certain tree and tell you stories from when we planted as a seedling when we were children and how today it stands to form a part of the forest canopy.

From this experience, we highly value *pakigdumala* or accompaniment not only with people but also with our land. We still have a long way to go in terms of regenerating our forest, but we proceed with much hope and vitality knowing that we are not alone.

6. The responsibility to make a difference rests on all of us

Indigenous communities are at the frontiers; this makes us principal partners in global dialogue for transformative change. Indigenous peoples are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, 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)

Further in Laudato Si', "local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. They are also concerned about what they will eventually leave to their children and grandchildren. These values are deeply rooted in indigenous peoples." (LS 179)

Global movements that advance ecological conversion and social justice are creating a new platform for collaboration that not only allows for broader inclusion, especially of indigenous communities but also empowers them to take lead in action. We need to continue learning how to do this better at all levels—local, national and global— because the only way to make a genuine change is if we try to understand each other and work together.

These six steps that emerged from reflections need to be shared in community and in school:

- Gratitude
- Reconciling
- Belonging
- Listening
- Responding
- Responsibility for a difference

These six steps are leading us to:

1. Form a team supporting each other
2. Share visions and goals, and start to plan in a more integrated way with indicators
3. Know what we are achieving (i.e., footprints) and draw in others to help (programs and people)
4. Seek to engage and communicate the journey with all
5. Strengthen leadership and learning
6. Celebrate accomplishments and make it fun for others to engage and learn

4 Commitments: Laudato Si' and Indigenous Peoples

As Indigenous Peoples, Laudato Si' has helped us in deepening our understanding of our own relationship with the land. We value its articulation of the role of spirituality in caring for our common home. We understand this from our own culture where our faith in the Creator is what binds us to our land.

At the same time, Laudato Si' challenges us to strengthen our efforts and responses to the complex concerns in our community and beyond. We are empowered by the recognition of the integrity and capacity of the indigenous communities. We are energized to learn and move with others towards the common goal for all.

Laudato Si' allows us to find common ground from which we can share our stories with others. We look towards a future that is more inclusive and equal, humbly offering the dignity of all and the basic right that comes from this.

We have identified the following points of commitments we hope to guide our future actions:

For the Forest and Water

- Continue our accompaniment of the regeneration of our forests that once experienced massive degradation
- Continue to empower our youth so that they can take the lead in the management of our ancestral domain
- Continue to seek the guidance of the Tribal Elders whose wisdom always honors the covenant of peace
- Respect the waters that sustain our lives by observing proper waste management and practicing water management methods in the forest, farm, and community
- Keep developing this attitude of care with each other and with the land so that this interconnected relationship that guides our daily action may continue to move us to a new solidarity

For Education

- Continue to learn better ways to provide an education that values culture and the environment
- Create ecological citizenship through education that pays equal importance to academics and values
- Envision our students as leaders who can articulate their concerns and share their hopes for their community, always emphasizing their sense of responsibility to their ancestral lands and their belonging to their culture
- Accompany the youth and share in their hopes and dreams

For Solidarity

- Work with our neighboring communities and strengthen the practices of *bentela daw sayuda* (to visit and share information), *tapok* (gatherings in support of cultural reflection and collaboration) especially amongst the youth
- Seek a deeper experience of peace across the land according to the cultural processes of *pulang* and *nalandangan* to reconcile with all and build a peaceful nation
- Build a broader collaboration along the Pantaron Range to learn and train youth in forest and water management for the good of the community
- Engage with government staff and programs in seeking better services for all the communities and efforts focused on improving livelihoods within the culture and strengthening the relationship with the land
- Seek greater solidarity in improving markets, added value for farm gate prices
- Engage globally in sharing our experiences of Laudato Si', especially through Balay Laudato Si' initiatives and in church and indigenous youth dialogue of care and hope

5 The Story of Mindanao's Indigenous Peoples: Their Threats, Opportunities, and Hope

Threats

We are facing many challenges in Mindanao. First is the inadequate response of industry and government to the challenges primarily faced by Indigenous Peoples. While indigenous communities are the ones who are in the margins and the ones who are taking care of the land, we are not adequately recognized.

The national economy treats Mindanao as *puhunan* (something to capitalize on). We see this in all the massive plantations, but what we fail to see are the looming challenges brought about by these investments towards greater local sustainability and opportunity. There is no real response to regulate resource extraction to protect the common people that will be adversely affected by it economically and environmentally.

There is also little support to capacitate communities to take care of their land to avoid disaster risk, like typhoons and flooding. There is a disconnect in the response of the government to what the actual needs of the people are. In cases of climate disaster, relief goods are given out, but no long-term system of response is put in place for many communities in the margins.

Water is seen primarily for its commercial value, but people fail to see its distinct relations to their own life and with other creatures. We used to manage our own water resources but most villages today cannot sustain the quality or quantity of good water throughout the year. The value of water as tied to our cultural identity is slowly diminishing as the supply of clean water for household use is threatened.

There is no urgency to the crisis on water and its consequent impacts on health, food safety, and livelihood because much of the focus is on the production or generation of services by corporations, not an integral land use management. Rivers and oceans are increasingly and alarmingly contaminated and polluted.

Similarly, people are failing to see the serious deterioration in the forest, which, like water, has a direct link to our culture and identity. Today, we no longer understand the weather and have difficulty moving our agricultural activities in-sync with the weather. Because of this gap and confusion, people are resorting to more commercial means of managing their crops, tending to go for the "easier way" like the use of glyphosate. This is a great threat because it affects both our waters and our lands in an almost irreversible way as well as local food security.

Our land is our life and what we do with it now determines our future.

Opportunities

Learnings from our experiences are used as basis for better response. What we can do to respond and overcome our difficulties is by way of connecting with other sectors like the government or church, as led by the youth who are the prime actors in moving for change.

In our case in Bendum, we welcome youth in community, even those coming from other villages as far as Agusan, so they can have the opportunity to learn how to manage natural resources through various ways. These include going back to school through APC, where much focus is given to the subject of Natural Resource Management. They can also join *Hulas*, a youth training program, or join the Forest Management Office team. Many of these youth have seen the same threats in their own communities.

Through the training or education opportunity that they acquire while working with us, they are able to deepen and share their understanding of these threats to their communities and build the capacity so that when they go home, they can work with local officials and other youth. This is how we empower the youth in Upper Pulangi, through leadership grounded in cultural knowledge, care for the land, and service for others.

Furthermore, our indigenous way of life provides a more sustainable alternative to the more mainstream consumerist lifestyle in the city. Government policymakers can learn much from the indigenous way of living, our 'buen vivir'. We must strive to create policies that do not pose threats to the life and land of those in the uplands while we look for the balance in sharing ecological services between the uplands and lowlands. This provides a great opportunity for dialogue and collaboration as to how we effectively manage ecological services.

Although we continue to struggle with stable livelihood opportunities, we do not take for granted the clean air and water, the peace, and the sense of security we have when there are strong rains. We have this because we manage our natural resources and are perhaps more prepared in cases of calamity given where we build and the root crops we plant. Moreover, we see great opportunity in our own awareness that on the flipside of the threats are occasions to learn and participate in action for response. While we are facing many threats in our environment and way of life, we are not simply sitting idly waiting for what will happen next, but are on our feet working with different groups to respond better. This time may be full of challenges but it is also the best opportunity to learn and move with others from a local to a global scale.

Hope

We envision a future where we, the Indigenous Peoples have a strong hold on the shared responsibility to address our common concerns for the environment and for our cultures.

We hope that all Indigenous Peoples continue to deepen their relationship with *Migtanghaga daw tanghaga* (Creator and creations) and that other people in broader society may also learn from this and start to value our inherent interconnectedness to each other.

For the rest of the world, we hope that they move in solidarity with all Indigenous Peoples around the globe, that they may also see and feel our vision for a better future. We look forward to a more focused response to the challenges that we are facing through a broader and stronger collaboration from all sectors.

We deeply hope for government and church responses and partnerships that sustain and effectively address the real concerns of Indigenous Peoples. Specifically, we hope for a better response during climate disasters and to improve economic market for our crops.

For the youth, we hope that they continue to strive to build capacity to stand for their own culture and land. The youth holds the future for us all - our land, our culture, and our own survival rest in their hands.

A Prayer

We are here to dialogue, discern and act to support the desires of fragile peoples who live in the margins of societies. Let us begin in prayer, in thanksgiving to the *Migtanghaga,* the Creator.

"And God saw that it was good..." and that goodness has been handed down through our ancestors. We are grateful for our life and our roots, our culture and diversity, our land and water, and all manner and form of life. We know from our ancestors that the land and all that lives upon it are given to us through God's love, and again, through the saving power of Jesus. It is this love of God that assures us of the meaning of life, and that it is not simply power that wins.

We may think at times we own the land, but over time we come to recognize the land claims us. If we do not care for the land, it is difficult to experience God as creator and lover of all life.

Lord, we seek to be in solidarity with those who suffer with violent storms, raging fires, eroding lands, rising seas. So much of our corals are already cooked, forests cut and waters polluted and diverted. Even the winds now come to destroy us and wash us away. We pray that all people of faith acknowledge a responsibility for neighbor and care of creation, and that together we can seek to deepen that commitment.

We pray for different institutions. We are thankful for their recognition of the fragility of the poor. They have an important role of inspiring people and in building solidarity of awareness.

We pray for unity and collaboration, that we go beyond just sharing our problems but working together on solutions. We should not give up, but continue to work with each other to find solutions to our common problems. We need solidarity of others so our voices are heard.

If we have a problem, we need to create solutions, not just rely on others. We seek the energy and the grace to do this by going deeper into the culture, our relationship with the land, with the natural resources, with the Creator. We ask each of us to reflect on what we value, how we balance our self-interests in relation to how we live with other people and with Creation.

We pray for community, church, and government to come together for dialogue, discernment, and deeds. Yet our greatest prayer is for community. We pray for internal unity in communities. We pray that we remain grounded in our cultures, so that we can express ourselves and our identity when any intervention comes along.

We pray for the youth, both in the mainstream and in the margins. We pray for people in the mainstream society, especially the youth.

Often, they ignore people in the margins, especially the youth. We pray that they care about what happens to us. We hope that they recognize our intrinsic value. Even if we live in the margins, our education is solid, because we are living out our culture. Our education is based on our way of life and is connected to our *gaup*, our ancestral lands.

We pray that mainstream society listens and understands our way of life in the margins and not try to simply absorb us.

We hope that others can use our knowledge and experience as an inspiration to confront challenges, including climate change, and not just complain. We hope others can learn to see how communities in the margins are on our feet: moving, acting, even if lacking in support.

We pray together in solidarity with hope in our hearts that the love of the Creator is able to work within us to regenerate the life of the lands and the seas and we can share the resources and the meaning of life in full and free diversity.

Amen.

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