

Presentation of Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship.

Research Project:

**Degradation of the Earth and Water**

**ways:**

Where have the Forests and Rivers gone in  
Oamug?

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# Presentation Outline :

- Purpose of the study
- Background-of research and Papua New Guinea.
- Introduction:
- Oamug 50 years ago
- Oamug today
- Examples of degradation of earth and waterways
- Action forward
- Recommendations
- Conclusion
- References

# Purpose of the Research

- Why there is grass and no forests. Why the rivers and creeks are gone:
- To identify:
  - Factors that contribute to environmental degradation in Papua New Guinea and in particular at Oamug village.
  - The effects of current activities done to the environment.
  - Some possible practices to minimize destruction done to the environment for the purpose of preserving it for the future generation.
- Impelled by Pope Francis' 'Laudato Si- Care of our Common Home.

# Back ground of Research

- Three main causes of environmental degradation in Papua New Guinea;
- Increase logging by foreign companies without replacing new ones.
- Mining companies destroying the land, forests, wildlife and polluting the rivers.
- Most important, treat to Papua New Guinea is agricultural expansion for commercial and everyday survival purpose.

- While it is an issue for the whole country, the research focuses on one small village called Oamug in the Western Highlands Province as a case study. The research discusses the effects of cutting down bushes, digging up the land and destroying of waterways every day for survival purposes.
- This research focuses on how unsystematic expansion of agriculture and housing for survival purposes contribute to the degradation of the earth and its resources.

# Background of Papua New Guinea

- Papua New Guinea is a small island nation located in the Pacific region comprised of 22 provinces under 4 main regions known as New Guinea Islands, Momase, Papuans, and the Highlands region.
- It is blessed with beautiful resources such as the sea, rivers, mountains, white sandy beach, flora and fauna, minerals and colourful animals ranging from the seas to the mountains.



- Rich country but 75% of the population still live in villages depending entirely on the land for food, shelter, water and air.
- Land is customarily owned, is passed on from generation after generation.
- Owning a big portion of land is seen as a rich person.

- There are more than 800 languages and cultures.
- People are isolated from most of the government services due to geographical situation and corruption of government systems.



## Oamug is in Mt Hagen-in the Highlands region of PNG



## Walking to Oamug





# Introduction

- Degradation of the earth is an issue affecting people all over the world.
- Degradation of the Earth and the Water Sources in Papua New Guinea for survival purpose is an unrecognizable issue for many years.
- Not seen as a danger to the earth and the water sources.
- They have to do what they do each day to survive. They are not wrong but what are the alternatives.....?

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- Oamug is also affected with this issue of degradation of the earth and it is the focus of my research.

# What is left for this generation?



# Oamug 50 years ago.

- People lived on the land for many centuries.
- All livelihood was from the natural resource.
- No government services such as schools, roads and hospitals.
- Not many people- quiet, peaceful, most forests and rivers were not touched.
- Closely related to the earth- Respect the earth as sacred- people turn to the earth for spiritual, emotional, health and physical needs of their wellbeing.

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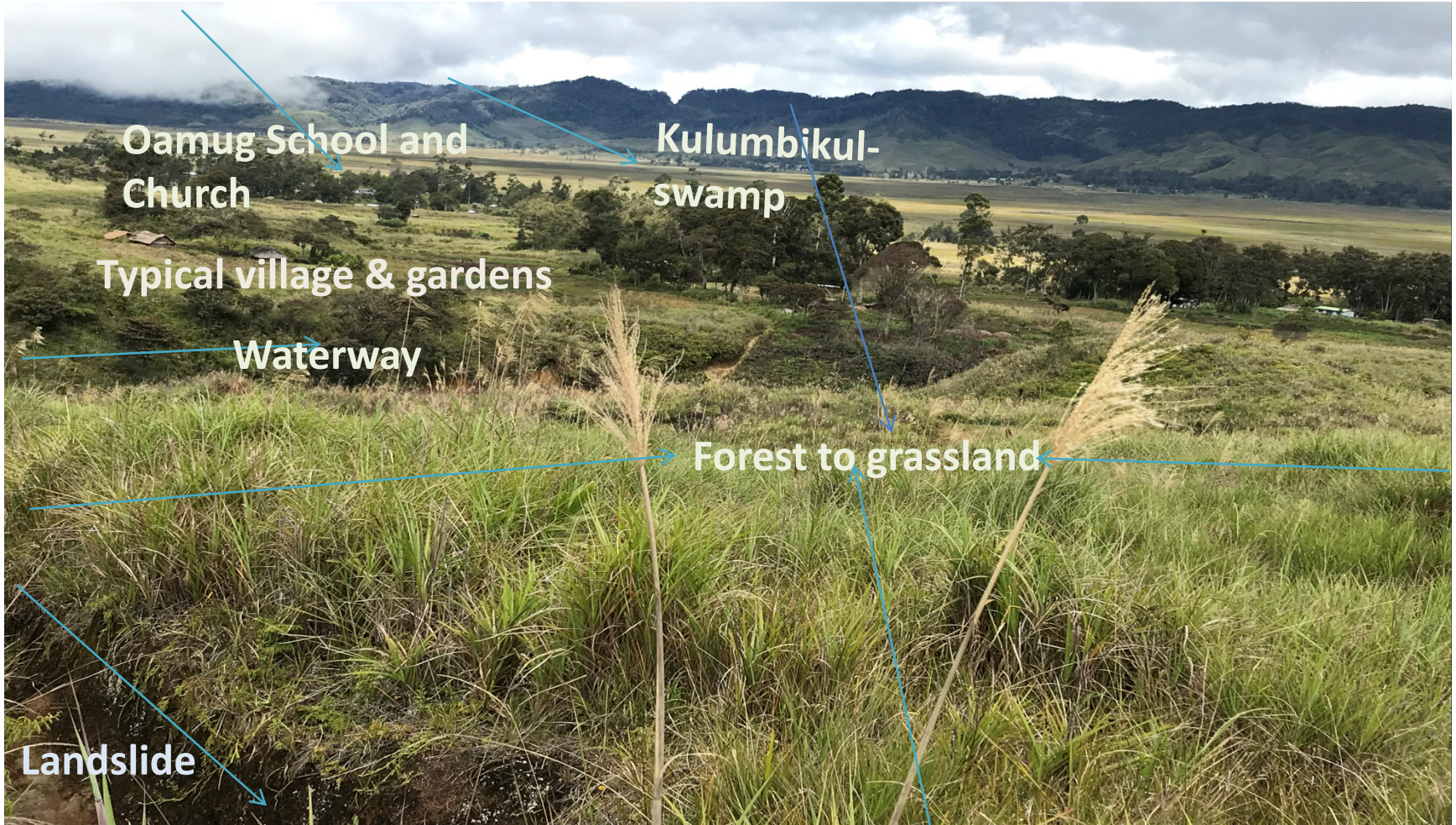
- Oamug had thick forests with variety of wildlife- plants, birds, animals, insects, fruits, nuts.
- A lot of clear running rivers and creeks- used for different purposes- healing, washing, cooking, drinking.
- Special plants for healing, making peace and reconciliation, telling the seasons and time.
- No road links to Mt Hagen city.
- Spoke only their native language- Melpa

Papua New Guinea is blessed with clean flowing rivers and thick jungles and forests





# Oamug Now



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- Oamug village is about one and half hour drive from Mt Hagen city, in the highlands of PNG.
- Oamug people's livelihood is still depended entirely on the environment by gardening and raising livestock (pigs) for their daily survival and to generate income..
- Basic services like schools, health and road are key to the lives of the people now. .
- Most speak Tok Pisin & few speak some English.

# Services at Oamug:

A primary school.



# Catholic Church



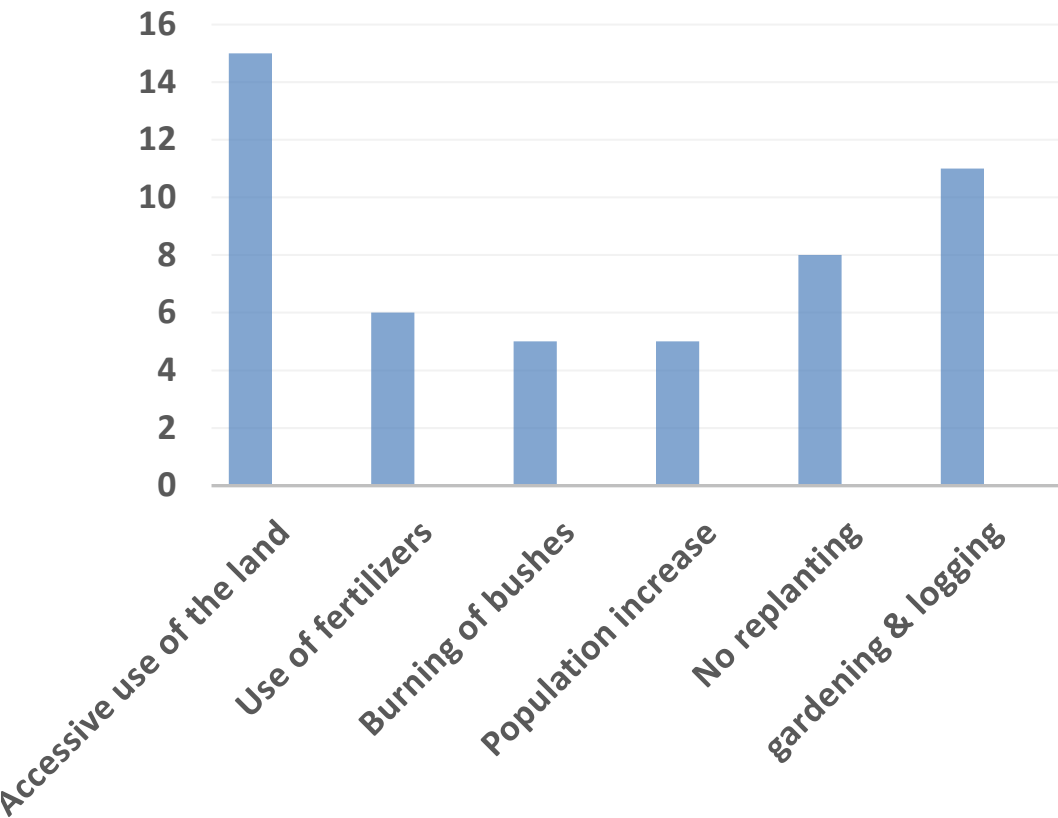
# Church and education services are very vital for the Oamug community



# Hand made road to Oamug



# Contributing factors of degradation of earth and waterways in Oamug.



- Overuse of the land
- Too many pesticides used for farming activities
- Destroying the natural environment by burning.
- High demand of resources due to population increase
- No replanting
- Gardening & logging activity

# Examples of human activity done to degrade the earth in Oamug.

*Below: Over use of the land-Planting the same food over and over on the same piece of land*



*Below: Cutting down pitpit and trees from the forest without replanting to build a house*





# Trees cut for firewood and building house everyday.



# Use of chemicals to fish and kill animals.

*The most famous bird of paradise has disappeared due to the continuous damaging and destruction of wild life.*



Some are endangered and about to die.

# Effects of unsystematic farming and the use of the forests.

- Forest are thinning.
- Lots of rivers and creeks are gone and polluted.
- Wildlife are gone.
- A lot of landslides and soil erosion..
- Gardening done along rivers for better harvest- but bury the rivers or pollute them with debris and garden waste.



# Thinning of Suma River:



# Actions forward:

Education and awareness at the school , church and community groups on:

- Climate change
- making nursery seedlings
- Family planning,
- Set up projects
- Use existing projects ; women support women, Cook House, Youth groups....

- Meet with various leaders (church leaders, and community leaders to

Set up some rules for the people to follow. For example; not to burn the bush, cut down trees, fishing and hunting with chemicals etc....

- Encourage people especially men and young boys to build houses that last long: permanent or semi permanent.

# Continue.....

- **Capacity building for women:**
- Empower women to exercise their right and freedom to participate fully in community & family decisions.
- Learn skills that will sustain them into the future; Eg: Cook House and women support women activities

Women support women  
(WSW)



# Continue.....

## **Create core groups of women leaders & youth groups:**

- Encourage women & youth to take leadership roles.
- Empower & encourage youths to create ways to generate income for themselves and that will sustain them into the future. Eg, planting trees, digging fish ponds, raising animals etc..



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Encourage youth to care for environment  
for future generation..





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## Education on family planning and climate change.

- Discuss with primary school administration and clinic administration about possibilities to teach about effects of climate change, population increase, social and eco justice issues that affect the earth community including human life.



Men build houses that last long instead of bush material houses that needs replacing every 5-10 years.



# Recommendation

## **Meetings with community and church leaders:**

- To set up a **Pilot Housing Project** in Oamug for the next five to ten years to build houses that will last long and enable the forests to grow which hopefully restore the rivers and creeks.
- Create community and church groups to work on life skills that will help Oamug to sustain itself into the future.

# Conclusion

- Oamug is the microcosm of the whole country and so what is happening in Oamug reflects what is happening in other parts of Papua New Guinea and other countries in the world.

## Reflective question

- How do I see my relationship with nature in which I live?

# References

Francis, P. (2015). *Laudato SI* On care for our environment, An encyclical Letter on Ecology and Climate: Saint Pauls Publications-Society of Paul , New South Wales 2135

<http://www.stpauls>