

## Targeting The Root Causes Of Issues



*Sr. Theresia Tina*

In recent months, Sr. Theresia Tina travelled to the Philippines to present at the International Federation of Social Workers Asia-Pacific Conference. She has shared some of her experiences from her well-spent time there.

Firstly, I am grateful to Sister Angela Reed, Marietta Latonio (Program Coordinator of the Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF)) and the MELF team for putting forward my MELF research to the Conference organising Committee, which was accepted to be presented. I am also grateful to the former institute leader, Sister Eveline Crotty, and her team for their support.

The conference was an event that widened my understanding of the millions of people across the globe who invest their lives for the common good. Social workers came from all over the world. There were about 1,500–2,000 people in attendance. The participants came with their own specialist areas, such as human trafficking, homelessness, climate change, degradation of the earth, gender biased issues, and domestic violence, just to name a few. Some were invited to share, like I was in the share-out rooms.

Most of the keynote speakers, as well as in the panel presentations, emphasised how important and powerful it was to start at the grass roots and target the root cause of issues. For example, one panelist who presented on the rivers being polluted in Cebu, said the five universities in the city had come together to target this issue. While they had spent several years doing this, no change had happened. This time they joined with the communities living on that part of the river in deciding to focus only on one part of the river, starting from the top of the river and going downstream.



*Left – Marietta Lotonio and Sister Theresia Tina. Right – Sister Theresia Tina presenting her research.*

I was there with Marietta to present my MELF research on the ‘Degradation of the Earth and Waterways: Where have the Forests and Rivers gone in Oamug?’. Our presentation was very simple, practical, and grass roots based. We discussed how ordinary grass root communities, for the purposes of surviving, are damaging the earth and waterways without recognising that their day-to-day actions are contributing to the disappearance of waterways, forests, and wild life.

There were three presenters on the panel, including me. Another panelist presented on the pollution of the big river in Cebu City, and the other presented on the work of insects in the environment.

While I was there, I was also able to visit a hub for trafficked women, which is supported by Mercy Works. I was heartbroken by the stories of some of the women, ages ranging from seven onward. I could not believe what I saw and heard from these lovely women, who are the images of God. One night they took me to an outreach program, and that was even more heartbreaking to see what they were having to do to survive. I thought I was imagining or dreaming, but it was real. I felt handicapped by not being able to do something for them on the spot, and in my heart, I offered a silent prayer to God.

I am grateful for the work that Mercy Works does in reaching out to the trafficked women there, and I felt connected with them.

*This article was first published on the website of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG). For more information on the work of ISMAPNG, please visit their website at [www.institute.mercy.org.au](http://www.institute.mercy.org.au)*