

## Conference Report

# International Conference on Sustainable Alternatives to Poverty Reduction and Ecological Justice (SAPREJ-18)

**Date:** June 26 – 29, 2018

**Venue:** The University of the South Pacific, Fiji

**Organizer:** Eberhard Weber

From June 26 -29, 2018, the 18th international conference on Sustainable Alternatives to Poverty Reduction and Ecological Justice (SAPREJ-18) took place at The University of the South Pacific (USP). The aim of the conference was to strengthen academic and interfaith dialogue on major social and environmental challenges that the Pacific Islands and other parts of the world are facing in the 21st century.

SAPREJ-18 was the fourth conference in a series. The series was established by the Orthodox Academy of Crete at Kolympari, Chania, Crete, where the first international conference on Sustainable Alternatives for Poverty Reduction and Eco-Justice (SAPREJ-12) took place in September 2012.

The aim of the SAPREJ conferences is to engage in dialogue on key social, economic, and ecological concerns from a variety of perspectives. Its goals include the promotion of social and ecological justice (among others). SAPREJ focuses both on religiously based as well as academic approaches to challenges of sustainability and injustice.

After the 1st SAPREJ in 2012 in Crete, organizers and participants felt a need to engage particularly scholars and practitioners in the developing world in dialogue about poverty reduction and eco-justice. Accordingly, SAPREJ-14 was organized, and was held in 2014 in Antananarivo, Madagascar, and two years later, in 2016, more than 100 scholars met for the 3rd SAPREJ conference at the Kyambogo University in Kampala, Uganda. The School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment at USP was selected to host the conference in 2018, discussing issues of environmental ethics, poverty, and sustainable development in the face of the threat of climate change.

SAPREJ-18 attracted some 35 social scientists, clerics, activists, and governmental representatives from 22 countries (Australia, Belize, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Fiji, France, Germany, Greece, India, Israel, Kiribati, Mali, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Switzerland, Tonga, Turkey, Tuvalu, Uganda, UK, and the USA), including six participants from Iran, who delivered their presentations via video conferencing, and one participant who addressed the audience remotely from the Climate Change meeting of the World Council of Churches being held in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

On June 26, 2018, the guest-of-honor, Mr. Penijamini Lomaloma, Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Development Forum, highlighted the responsibility people today have to assure that living conditions for generations to come will be humane. Mr. Lomaloma stressed that it would be irresponsible to continue business as usual. He demanded considerable change in the way people treat each other as well

as the environment. The abolition of poverty and an end to environmental degradation need to go hand in hand. To achieve both of these aims, science and religion are equally important and need to cooperate.

In the keynote address, Professor Matthew Allen, Director of Development Studies at USP, spoke on “Natural Resource Justice? The Political Ecology of Resource Extraction in the Western Pacific.” The keynote address was a very timely acknowledgment that issues related to political and economic realities of resource exploitation in Melanesia pose very serious threats to local communities. These threats have existed since colonial times, but even in an era of formal independence they add to the vulnerabilities of local communities in many ways. Impacts of climate change do not create such vulnerabilities, but they increase the challenges people are facing.

The first day of the conference was dominated by papers on social justice and poverty alleviation in the context of environmental and climate change. Liam Saddington (Oxford University) talked on “Small Island Imaginaries, Climate Change and Geopolitics: An Examination of Seychelles and Kiribati”; he was followed by Renata Varea and Rufino Varea (both of USP), who looked at aspects of environmental entitlements in their paper titled “Environmental Inequality and Ecological Justice: Pretext of Environmental Entitlement in Community-based Marine Management in Fiji.” Professor Heather Worth and her PhD scholar, Karen McMillen, (University of New South Wales, Sydney) presented on their research on “Climate Change, Urban Poverty and Sex Work in the Pacific.” Another paper on urban poverty and social justice was presented by Camari Koto (USP) in her paper on “Questioning Social Justice in Informal Settlement Upgrading: The Case of Namadai.”

The afternoon session of Day 1 started with a paper on “Gender and Social Capital Dynamics in Adaptation to Climate Variability and Change in Semi-arid Northeastern Nigeria” by Othniel Yila (Climate Finance Adviser, Kingdom of Tonga) and Jummai O. Yila (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Mali), before Aylin Yildiz (University of Bern) talked on “A Legal Challenge for Ecological Justice: What Is Our Common Normative Framework?” Day 1 ended with a video conference presentation from Tehran, Iran, on “Protecting Environment's Protectors” by Ali Akbar Siapoush, (Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran).

Day 2 put the emphasis on ethics, interfaith dialogue, and justice in development. The day started with Reverend Grace Lubaale (Kyambogo University, Uganda) on “Poverty in Uganda: Causes and Strategies for Reduction with Great Emphasis on Ethics and Ecological Justice” followed by Markand Bhatt (USP) who spoke on “Approaches to Sustainability Based on Hindu Scriptures.” Professor Natasha Delani Kuruppu (UNEP DTU Partnership, Technical University of Denmark, København) and Peni Hausia Havea (PACE-SD, USP) talked on “The Role of Church and Indigenous Spirituality in Community Led Health Adaptation” before Lesya Sabada (University of Saskatchewan, Canada) concluded the morning session of Day 2 with her presentation on “Eastern Christian Theological Resources in Action For Peacebuilding and Environmental Ethics.”

The remainder of the morning on Day 2 was an interfaith panel discussion on ethical considerations concerning poverty and environmental and ecological justice. Members of the panel were: The Most Reverend Winston Halapua, Archbishop of the Diocese of Polynesia of the Anglican Church; Reverend Jeremaia Waqainabete, Deputy General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Fiji and

Rotuma; Paul B Whippy, Welfare Manager, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and Roshni Pal, Fiji Hindu Society. Archbishop Halapua told the participants of the conference that, in all the decades he has served for the Anglican Church in the Pacific Island region, this was the first event ever of this kind and he leaves the conference as a different person than he was before he came to attend the meeting. He was particularly impressed by the depth of interfaith discussions and dialogue the conference facilitated.

The afternoon on Day 2 started with a video conference presentation from Buenos Aires, Argentina, where at the same time a Climate Change meeting of the World Council of Churches (WCC) took place. Lucas Andrianos (WCC, Greece) talked on “Oikos Spiritualities and Greed Line Concepts as Principles of Sustainability.” After two more presentations, one on “Enabling Equity and Poverty Reduction through Community Sustainable Fisheries Management—Case Study from Qoliqoli Cokovata, Macuata Province, Fiji” by Francis Areki (WWF-Pacific, Fiji) and one on “Ethics, Food and Biodiversity—Traditional Food Security Knowledge and Humanitarian Aid in the Phase of Climate Change” by Ilaisa Naca (USP), two further video conference presentations from Tehran, Iran, one by Razieh Mehrdadfar (Tehran, Iran) on “Children’s Education as an Essential and Accessible Sustainable Solutions for Poverty Reduction and Ecological Justice” and one by Zhila Fathi (Iran University of Applied Sciences and Technology, Shabestar, Iran) on “International Obligations of Governments to Educate Citizens to Protect the Environment,” concluded Day 2.

On Day 3, some of the participants went in small groups to nearby squatter settlements to gain a first-hand impression of social, economic, and environmental challenges there. Others went to a community close to Suva where communities had established Marine Protected Areas. The opportunity to see development challenges in Fiji as well as people’s initiatives to make a difference was highly appreciated by participants from outside Fiji and the Pacific Island region.

Day 4 started with “Water Scarcity and Its Negative Impacts on Health – A Case Study of Funafuti, Tuvalu” presented by Maluseu Tapaeko (University of Porto, Portugal); this was followed by Catherine Garnett-Santiago (Belize), who talked on “Urban Livelihoods of Landless People – A Livelihood Vulnerability Assessment of an Informal Settlement in Suva, Fiji.”

“Is There Any Chance for the Poor to Cope with Extreme Environmental Events? A Case Study in the Solomon Islands” was the question asked by Michael Ha'apio, Morgan Wairiu (both PACE-SD, USP), and Ricardo Gonzalez (Universidad de La Frontera, Chile) in their presentation.

From New York (USA), Professor Seyed Masoud Noori (NYU Law School) and Hossein Hafezian (Montclair State University, New Jersey) gave a video conference presentation on “Women's Participation in Policies and Decision Making as Prerequisite in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

In the afternoon of the last day, Alice Tekaieti (Tarawa, Kiribati) talked about “Sustainability and Indigenous Knowledge: The role of Schooling in Kiribati.” This was followed by three video conference presentations :“The Right to Food and the Right to Environment: Accompaniment or Conflict?” by Alireza Mohammadnezhad Daryani (Islamic Azad University, Tehran) and Zhila Fathi

(Iran University of Applied Sciences and Technology, Shabestar, Iran); “Women’s Education and Leadership as Essential and Accessible Sustainable Solutions for Poverty Reduction and Ecological Justice” by Zahra Azhar (Shahid Beheshti University, Iran) and Shahideh N. Mohajer (Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, EHESS); and “Displacement Due to the Natural Disasters, Refugee Status and Sustainable Development” by Hiwa Hajimolla (Shahid Beheshti University) and Aida Abdollahi (Iran). The conference ended with a presentation by Eberhard Weber (USP) on “Globalization and Poverty in India: How Do Human Rights Relate to It?”

All in all, the conference attracted some 120 participants other than the presenters. Members of the Fiji Government, including the Minister for Waterways and Environment, Dr. Mahendra Reddy, as well as members of the opposition such as Mr. Niko Naiwaikula, joined in the discussions.

In closed sessions of the organizers, it was decided that the next SAPREJ, in 2020, will be held in Kenya.

**Eberhard Weber**  
**USP, Suva**





*26–29 June, 2018, Marine (Lower) Campus  
Marine Lecturer Theatre  
The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji*

## PROGRAMME

### Tuesday 26 June

- 8:30–9:30am Registration
- 9:45am Interfaith Prayer
- 10:00–10:30am Opening of the Conference by Mr. **Penijamini Lomaloma**, Deputy General Secretary of the Pacific Island Development Forum
- 10:30am Keynote Address by **Matthew Allen**, Professor and Director of Development Studies at The University of the South Pacific; Title of Keynote address: **“Natural resource justice? The political ecology of resource extraction in the western Pacific”**
- 11.00am **Morning Tea**

11.30am–2:00pm **Session 1**

**“Small island imaginaries, climate change and geopolitics: An examination of Seychelles and Kiribati”**

*Liam Saddington, DPhil Candidate in Geography and the Environment, St. Catherine's College, Oxford*

**“Environmental inequality and Ecological justice: pretext of environmental entitlement in community-based marine management in Fiji”**

*Renata Varea School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment and Rufino Varea, School of Marine Science, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji*

**“Climate Change, Urban Poverty and Sex Work in the Pacific”**

*Heather Worth and Karen McMillan, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, UNSW, Sydney, Australia*

**“Questioning social justice in informal settlement upgrading: the case of Namadai”**

*Camari Koto, School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment, The University of the South Pacific, Fiji*

2:00pm-3:00pm **Lunch**

3:00pm–5:30pm **Session 2**

**“Gender and social capital dynamics in adaptation to climate variability and change in semi-arid Northeastern Nigeria”**

*Othniel Yila and Jummai O. Yila, Climate Finance Adviser, Kingdom of Tonga and International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Bamako, Mali*

**“Clean Geothermal Power for Pacific Islands”**

*Klaus Regenauer-Lieb, Professor and Head of the School of Minerals and Energy Resources Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, UNSW Sydney, NSW 2052 Australia*

**“A legal challenge for ecological justice: What is our common normative framework?”**

*Aylin Yildiz, PhD scholar in Law, World Trade Institute, University of Bern, Switzerland*

**“Protecting environment's Protectors”**

*Seyed Masoud Noori, Scholar in Residence, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ), NYU Law School, USA and Ali Akbar Siapoush, PhD Candidate of Public International Law, Shahid Beheshti University (SBU) Tebran, Iran*

**Presentation through video conference from Teheran, Iran**

**Wednesday 27 June**

9:00–11:00am

### Session 3

#### **“Poverty in Uganda: Causes and Strategies for Reduction with great Emphasis on Ethics and Ecological Justice”**

*Rev. Grace Lubaale, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Teacher Education and Development Studies, Kyambogo University, Uganda*

#### **“Approaches to Sustainability based on Hindu Scriptures”**

*Markand Bhatt, School of Economics, The University of the South Pacific, Fiji*

#### **“The Role of Church and Indigenous Spirituality in Community Led Health Adaptation”**

*Natasha Delani Kuruppu, UNEP DTU Partnership, Technical University of Denmark, København and Peni Hausia Havea, PhD scholar, Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD), The University of the South Pacific*

#### **“Eastern Christian Theological Resources in Action For Peacebuilding and Environmental Ethics”**

*Lesya Sabada, St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada*

11:00-11:30am

### Morning Tea

11:30am–1:30pm

#### **Interfaith Panel Discussion: To honour and respect creation?! Where to go, what to do?**

Representatives from different faiths discuss social and environmental challenges and ethical and practical ways to deal with them

1:30–3:00pm

### Lunch Break

3:00–5:30pm

### Session 4

#### **“Oikos spiritualities and greed line concepts as principles of sustainability”**

*Lucas Andrianos, World Council of Churches (WCC), Economic and Ecological Justice (EEJ), Crete, Greece. (video conference presentation from the Climate Chance meeting of the WCC in Buenos Aires, Argentina)*

#### **"Enabling Equity and Poverty Reduction through Community Sustainable Fisheries Management- Case Study from Qoliqoli Cokovata, Macuata Province, Fiji.**

*Francis Areki, Director-Conservation, WWF-Pacific, Suva, Fiji*

#### **“Ethics, Food and Biodiversity - Traditional Food Security Knowledge and Humanitarian Aid in the Phase of Climate Change”**

*Ilaisa Naca, PhD scholar in the School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.*



**“Children’s Education as an Essential and Accessible Sustainable Solutions for Poverty Reduction and Ecological Justice”**

**Seyed Masoud Noori**, *Scholar in Residence, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ), NYU Law School, USA* and **Razieh Mehrdadfar**, *Attorney at Law, LLM in Human Rights Law, Tehran, Iran.*

**“International Obligations of Governments to Educate Citizens to Protect the Environment”**

**Zhila Fathi**, *LLM in Public Law, and lecturer in Law School, Iran University of Applied Sciences and Technology (UAST) Shabestar, East Azarbaijan, Iran.*

**Presentation through video conference from Teheran, Iran**

09:00–11:00am

**Session 5**

**“Water scarcity and its negative impacts on health - A case study of Funafuti, Tuvalu”**

**Maluseu Tapaeko**, *Master in Hazards, Cities and Spatial Planning, University of Porto, Portugal*

**“Urban Livelihoods of landless people – A livelihood vulnerability assessment of an informal settlement in Suva, Fiji”**

**Catherine Garnett-Santiago**, *Belize*

**“Is there any chance for the poor to cope with Extreme Environmental Events? A case study in the Solomon Islands”**

**Michael Ha'apio** and **Morgan Wairiu**, *Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD), The University of the South Pacific, and, Ricardo Gonzalez*, *Department of Forest Sciences, Faculty of Agricultural and Forest Sciences, Universidad de La Frontera, Chile*

**“Women's Participation in Policies and Decision Making as Prerequisite in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”**

**Seyed Masoud Noori**, *Scholar in Residence, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ), NYU Law School, USA* and **Hossein Hafezian**, *Adjunct Assistant Professor of Political Science, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey, USA.*

**Presentations through video conference from New York, USA**

11:00–11:30am

**Morning Tea**

11:30–1:30pm

## Session 6

### “Community Vulnerability and Natural Hazards in the Pacific Islands”

*Eberhard H. Weber, School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.*

### “Pivotal Players: Pacific islands and the end of the fossil fuel era”

*Morgan, Wesley, School of Government, Development & International Affairs, The University of the South Pacific*

### “Climate Change and Food Security”

*Otto Navunicagi, Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD), The University of the South Pacific Suva, Fiji*

1:30–3:00pm

## Lunch Break

3:00–5:00pm

## Session 7

### “Sustainability and Indigenous Knowledge: The role of Schooling in Kiribati”

*Alice Tekaieti, Tarawa, Republic of Kiribati.*

### “Climate Change and Agriculture”

*Neekhil Prasad, School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment, The University of the South Pacific, Fiji*

### “The Right to Food and the Right to Environment: Accompaniment or Conflict?”

*Alireza Mohammadnezhad Daryani, Ph.D. candidate in Public Law, Islamic Azad University (IAU), Tebran, and Lecturer in Law School, IAU, Shabestar, East Azerbaijan, Iran and Zhila Fathi, LL.M. in Public Law, and Lecturer in Law School, Iran University of Applied Sciences and Technology (UAST) Shabestar, East Azerbaijan, Iran*

### “Women’s education and leadership as essential and accessible sustainable solutions for poverty reduction and ecological justice”

*Zahra Azhar, PhD Candidate of Public Law, Shahid Beheshti University and, Shahideh N. Mohajer, PhD candidate of Sociology, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)*

### “Displacement Due to the Natural Disasters, Refugee Status and Sustainable Development”

*Seyed Masoud Noori, Scholar in Residence, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ), NYU Law School, USA, Hiwa Hajimolla, PhD Candidate of International Law, Shahid Beheshti University (SBU), Iran and Aida Abdollahi, Iran*

*Presentations through video conference from Teheran, Iran*

### “Globalization and Poverty in India – How do Human Rights relate to it?”

*Eberhard H. Weber, School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.*