



A gathering of the Sama-Badjao Women's Association during Abigail's monitoring visit in Bato, Leyte, the Philippines

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2025.

This year has already been full of travel, collaboration and gatherings of friends old and new.

In February, I headed off to Kenya with ERD Board member Aoife Denton. It was my first visit since 2023, and it was wonderful to reconnect with our partners in Kenya. Aoife and I had the opportunity to visit the development projects in both Nairobi and Eldoret, and also had the chance to re-connect with the Irish Embassy. It was truly invigorating being back in East Africa, and meeting with our inspiring partners.

In March, Abigail travelled to the Philippines to visit two projects that we support through Edmund Rice Ministries Foundation. It was her first time in the Philippines, and it was a brilliant introduction to the country's rich history and diverse culture. She cannot wait to go back!

In May, we hosted our Annual General Meeting and a gathering of partners at our offices to explore options for the future of ERD. We thank all those who travelled from England, Italy, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Zambia and across Ireland to participate in these training and brainstorming sessions. As you'll read on page 8, the two days were energising and we look forward to ongoing conversations with our partners throughout this year.

We thank all our donors for their support this year, and we plan to stay in touch throughout 2025!

Fiona Dowling
Chief Executive

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ERD Update



Fiona and Aoife with EREEP staff, Community Health Promoters and young mothers from EREEP's Wezesha Dada Project

Fiona and Aoife head to Kenya

In February, Chief Executive Fiona Dowling and ERD Board Member Aoife Denton traveled to Kenya for a whirlwind week of partner visits and meetings. As this was Aoife's first time to Kenya and Fiona's first visit in a couple of years, the itinerary was packed with visits to projects in Nairobi and Eldoret to maximise their time there.

The week started with a visit to the Ruben Centre where Fiona and Aoife received a tour of the facilities and met with the management team and health centre staff. ERD has long supported the Ruben Health clinic, so it was impactful to see the strides made in maternal and child health since the project began.

Fiona and Aoife then headed to Kibera to visit Edmund Rice Centre Nairobi. The centre provides educational support to children and adults living with disabilities in the community. ERD currently funds the Empower Her project at the centre, which supports caregivers through economic empowerment. Fiona and Aoife visited some of the beneficiaries at their homes in Kibera and heard about the impact the centre has had on their families. They then headed over to Edmund Rice Catholic Education Centre (ERCEC) to meet with the school and project teams before flying to Eldoret.

In Eldoret, Fiona and Aoife visited Education for Life (EFL) and Edmund Rice Eldoret Empowerment Programme (EREEP). The EFL members welcomed the visitors with open arms, singing and dancing! At EREEP, they met with the project team members, and had the privileged of participating in a meeting with an inspiring group of teen and young mums from Langas.

Fiona and Aoife met Evelyn Maris, Deputy Head of Mission and Head of Cooperation, at the Irish Embassy. Many of the ERD-funded projects in Kenya receive Irish Aid funding through Misean Cara, so it was a great opportunity to connect the Embassy with the projects they support in Kenya so they can see the impact of their funding.

While the week was busy, Fiona and Aoife returned to Ireland energised and full of awe for all the wonderful project work they saw in Kenya. We thank all of the project teams, East Africa mission coordinator Br. John Paul Oluoch, Brothers' communities and our partners for the warm welcome, hospitality and support.



EFL volunteer Loice Chege, Fiona and Aoife at EFL in Eldoret (Left); Fiona and Aoife with ERCN staff Ann and Esther on a home visit (Right)

Reflection from Aoife Denton, ERD Board Director, on the Kenya trip:

Sometimes in life saying 'Yes' can lead to a real opportunity to grow as a person and experience something amazing. Saying 'Yes' to travel to Kenya to visit the ERD funded projects was one such time. It was sincerely an inspiring, eye-opening experience and one I will treasure forever. Having sat on the Board of ERD for a year now, I have learned so much about the charity's work but this trip brought that work to life. The impact of the funding, support and training provided by ERD was tangible. From the first day to the last it was evident that the liberation of people and communities from poverty and injustice was at the heart of all the projects.

The Ruben Centre was like an oasis in the middle of Mukuru. Leaving the centre that day I remember feeling in awe of what had been achieved by those at the centre. From birth right through to death, there was support for all at the centre. It offered health support, education, sustainability training, broadcasting training etc. At the maternal child health clinic, I was moved by the impact the programme had. Simple statistics on a wall told a story of lives saved and lives altered. The gift of life protected by the generous care given.

The ERCN visit was just as moving. A dedicated group employed at the centre shone with enthusiasm and pride as they showed us through the services they offered. From entry students and their families were supported to acquire an education, develop skills and to put these skills into practice in their lives. It was such a well thought out, needs-led project that it felt like one big family working to raise up the many and not just the one.

As a Deputy Principal, I was delighted to get an opportunity to visit ERCEC. The school visit was certainly a highlight. The vocational projects are vibrant and full with students who are learning lifelong skills. The teachers have developed programmes that are now accredited and students are leaving with transferable skills that will translate to employment. Truly life changing opportunities. It was nice to see a classroom called 'Waterford' at the school, remembering the legacy that began with Blessed Edmund Rice, the provision of life changing education truly living on. A quick turn around trip to Eldoret to visit EFL and EREEP was the finale of our trip. EFL showed us a wonderful warm welcome with an inspiring presentation about the work of the center. The afternoon visit to EREEP was the one to reduce me to awe inspired tears; the work carried out to support the mothers and children was so moving. The work not only met the material needs of those involved, it also met their emotional needs by building up their self esteem again. Helping people feel seen, heard and loved again. A liberation!

I thank all who made my visit possible and showed us such hospitality. I feel blessed to have met so many inspiring people who work tirelessly to promote the vision of ERD and bring it to life. Creating the butterfly effect; small actions bringing about significant and far reaching consequences.



The ERMFPI team with SPACERS project beneficiaries in the Chinese Cemetery in Cebu City

Abigail's Visit to the Philippines

ERD Capacity Development and Communications Manager Abigail Carney had the opportunity to travel to the Philippines to visit the team and projects of Edmund Rice Ministries Foundation Philippines Inc (ERMFPI). During her time there, she familiarised herself with ERMFPI's organisation, management team and governing body, and conducted monitoring visits of the two ERD-funded projects.

Abigail started her trip in Cebu City, where ERMFPI's Executive Director Betta Salera and Programme Manager Dominic Carangue accompanied her to the SPACERS project. SPACERS stands for Strengthening Participatory Advocacy and Community-based Enterprises in Resettlement Sites; the project works with beneficiaries in two resettlement sites in Cebu city—the Chinese cemetery and the port area. The project team used the 'furthest behind first' approach within Cebu by examining discrimination, shock and fragility, geographic isolation, socio-economic status, and governance to select the project locations; communities within the cemetery and on the sidewalks in the port area were identified as the most vulnerable groups in Cebu.

The project uses an accompaniment model to address these communities' needs through advocacy, livelihoods and linkage building. The advocacy is especially impressive and empowering to the beneficiaries. When the families living in the cemetery (some for over 40 years) were facing eviction, the project team worked alongside them to educate them on their rights, and ensured they were aware of their choices so that they could make informed decisions. The team have assisted both sites in forming Homeowners Associations (HOAs). By registering as HOAs with their Local Government Units, their communities are able to access government services. Abigail attended a workshop for the HOAs that the project was conducting, and it was brilliant to see the associations formalising their plans for the year and learning from each other.



Abigail pictured with two members of the Port Area's HOA in Cebu City



Sama-Badjao project beneficiaries in Bato, Leyte (Left); A beneficiary of the Sama-Badjao project planting a mangrove tree (Right)

After two days in Cebu, Abigail headed on an overnight ferry to Maasin to visit the Sama-Badjao community. ERMFPI has been accompanying the Sama-Badjao community since 2018, and their current project works with the Sama-Badjao on 'Building an Inclusive and Resilient Community' through culturally-sensitive disaster reduction, disaster resistance and livelihoods. The Sama-Badjao, also known as the 'sea gypsies,' are an indigenous group living in Dohlo, Bato, Leyte. Originally from Indonesia, they are a marginalised group that has been in the area since 1930s, and have often faced discrimination and stigma from the wider community. Due to their coastal inhabitancy and cultural ties to the sea, they are at higher risk for disasters and continually experience the impacts of climate change.

It was wonderful meeting the Sama-Badjao and learning about their ancestry and culture, hearing about their experiences working with ERMFPI and witnessing their daily life. Their engagement with the project has had a profound impact on their lives and their community. Beneficiaries noted that before the project, their days consisted of sitting around, gossiping, playing volleyball and resting. They knew their community needed improvements, but didn't do anything about it. The project team accompanied the beneficiaries and helped them leverage their own strengths to build a better community. The project supported the Sama-Badjao in forming a Women's Association, which is now formally registered and recognised by the government. All project plans go through the association, which has empowered the women to lead their community. The project has also had an impact in the wider community. Now, the Sama-Badjao children attend local schools and have been accepted by their peers. This is a notable change since the project began when the school planned to have separate classrooms for the Sama-Badjao due to fear they would be harassed and bullied. Before, Sama-Badjao wouldn't avail of health care from the hospital. Management would turn them away as they thought they wouldn't be able to pay. Now, the community accepts them and accommodates them at the clinics and local hospitals. They are active participants in their local community and are accepted by the local and municipal governments. This wider perception change is an outcome of the project's strong advocacy.

Additionally, the project has a mangrove restoration component as part of their disaster reduction plan. The team strategically plants mangroves in areas that not only protect the community from natural disasters, but prevents the area from being reclaimed by the government and the community from being re-settled as mangrove eco-systems are considered protected reservation areas. The mangrove project has also evolved into a livelihoods project. Instead of the project team purchasing seedlings from other areas, they encouraged the Sama-Badjao to grow their own seedlings, and the project purchases them from the community. The project team also promoted this to the local government and nearby institutions, and now they too purchase from the Sama-Badjao.

It was a wonderful week in the Philippines and we look forward to seeing how these projects continue to progress and innovate! We thank Misesan Cara for supporting these projects and thank the entire ERMFPI team for such a warm welcome.

Project Spotlight



Safeguarding Awareness Workshop in Vanimo, Papua New Guinea

Callan Services in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a vibrant country in the Pacific region with diverse cultures and languages. However, it also struggles with various socioeconomic issues, including limited access to healthcare, education and employment. It is estimated that at least 30% of the population have a form of disability. People with disabilities in PNG face significant challenges, including a higher risk of poverty and marginalisation.

In 1991, the Christian Brothers founded Callan Services with the support of Christian Blind Mission and Save the Children to respond to the needs of people living with disabilities in PNG. Now, Callan Services is the largest provider of services to children and adults with disabilities in PNG. It is a leading disability rights, advocacy and representative network of and for all people with disability in PNG, with a particular focus on inclusive education and training.

Last year, ERD funded the Disability PAWA Project at Callan Services, which brought Safeguarding, Gender Based Violence, and Sorcery Accusation Related Violence training and advocacy directly to communities. These training sessions equipped communities and staff with the skills and knowledge to address these topics, promoting safety and wellbeing within the communities and building advocacy skills. The project team developed culturally and linguistically appropriate safeguarding awareness campaigns and education materials for people with a disability and their families in four locations in PNG.

In addition to the PAWA project, the organisation ran several other projects in 2024, including sign language training to healthcare professionals, teachers, private sector and community members in order to increase connection with people with hearing impairments. They provided training to Community Based Inclusive Development Officers, Disabled People's Organisations, teachers and caregivers, to strengthen local capacity and foster community-based support, inclusion and accessibility.

Callan Services continues its core programming of outreach, screening, assessment, treatment, provision of devices and referrals to specialists for people with disabilities so that people living with a disability can participate in and contribute meaningfully to an inclusive society.

We thank Misesan Cara for supporting the PAWA project, and look forward to collaborating with Callan Services in the future.

Update from the ER Network

Advent Campaign in Schools

In collaboration with the Edmund Rice Schools Office in England, ERD developed an Advent Campaign for Irish and English schools. The campaign highlighted two Edmund Rice development projects: the Girls Empowerment project in Sierra Leone and Centro Hermano Manolo in Bolivia. The campaign materials included information on the projects, the contexts they operate in and the human rights issues the beneficiaries face. Powerpoint slides allowed students to learn more about the issues facing children and young adults across the world, and provided ways to advocate for the Right to Education.

Ann Nichols from Edmund Rice England visited schools in England (pictured) and facilitated sessions with students to educate them on Human Rights issues. Ann brought advocacy lessons to life using the development projects in the Advent Campaign materials.

Several schools decided to fundraise for the projects including Ardscoil Na Mara in Waterford, Sacred Heart Primary School in Derry and St. Mary's College in Liverpool. We thank all the pupils and staff for supporting these Edmund Rice education projects!



Reconnecting with Lontia in Dublin



Pictured (L-R): Abigail Carney, Naidi McDonnell and Lontia Chinkubala

The ERD team had the pleasure of meeting Lontia Chinkubala when she was in Dublin in January. Lontia served as the Africa Province Programme Manager from 2019 until 2022. Based in Lusaka, she worked closely with the mission coordinators across the province on proposal development, monitoring and reporting.

Lontia has started a new position as a Mentor with Misesan Cara. In her new role, Lontia will provide on the ground support to Misesan Cara funded projects in the Southern Africa region. We look forward to working with Lontia again, and wish her the best with this new venture!

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ERD Board Update



Partnership and Planning for the Future

Partners from across the Edmund Rice network (pictured) gathered at the ERD Offices in May for the AGM and a strategic look at the future of ERD. Partners from Edmund Rice Bicentennial Trust, Edmund Rice England and the Congregational Leadership Team joined the ERD team and Board for various training and learning sessions over two days.

Misean Cara's CEO John Moffett gave a fascinating talk on locally-led development and trends in the international development sector. Dochas' Head of Communications and Media Niall McDonald led a training session on Ethical Communications. Fiona Dowling facilitated several sessions on the missionary context in the current development sector, ethical fundraising frameworks and future planning for ERD.

The two-day event was a great opportunity for the ERD team and Board to engage with supporters inside and outside the Edmund Rice network. We also had the opportunity to celebrate current congregational leader (and former ERD Board Chair) Br. John Casey and ERD Board Member Br. Clement Sindazi's 60th Birthdays. Thank you to all who made the journey!



Pictured (L-R): Br. John Casey and Br. Clement Sindazi celebrating at Edmund Rice House

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