



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
**CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES**

PHILIPPINE PUBLIC POLICY IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

CONFRONTING THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE

WEBINAR SERIES PROCEEDINGS





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|  upcids Decolonial Studies |  upcids Health Systems Development |  UPCWGS |  upcids Assessment, Curriculum, & Technology Research |  upcids Education Research Program |  upcids Higher Education Research & Policy Reform |

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RATIONALE

The University of the Philippine Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) is the policy research unit of the University of the Philippines. Currently, under the UP Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, among the university mandate of the Center is “[t]o develop, organize and manage research issues of national significance” (UP Executive Order 9, 1985).

At present, UP CIDS is tasked by the University Strategic Plan for 2017 to 2023

[t]o contribute to national development through (a) knowledge creation (e.g., enhancing research publications and creative work), and (b) public service (e.g., enhancing policy research and popularizing UP’s research findings) (<https://www.up.edu.ph/about-up/strategic-plan/>).

To attain this goal, since August 2017, the UP CIDS currently has twelve (12) programs, which belong to the following clusters:

- 1.) Education and Capacity-Building Cluster
 - a.) Education Research Program (ERP)
 - b.) Program on Higher Education and Policy Reform (HERPRP)

2 PHILIPPINE PUBLIC POLICY IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

- c.) Assessment, Curriculum, Technology and Research Program (ACTRP)
- d.) Program on Data Science for Public Policy (DSPPP)
- 2.) Development Cluster
 - a.) Program on Escaping the Middle-Income Trap: Chains for Change (EMIT C4C)
 - b.) Political Economy Program (PEP)
 - c.) Program on Alternative Development (AltDev)
 - d.) Program on Health Systems Development (PHSD)
- 3.) Social, Political and Cultural Studies Cluster
 - a.) Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC)
 - b.) Islamic Studies Program (ISP)
 - c.) Strategic Studies Program (SSP)
 - d.) Decolonial Studies Program (DSP)

In light of the current political, economic, and sociocultural crisis brought about by COVID-19, the UP CIDS programs, from April 2020 onwards, revised its program activities to examine the negative impact of the pandemic and to propose possible solutions to this. **The Philippine Public Policy in a Time of Pandemic: Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge** webinar series thus aims to share to the public the findings of the research work which UP CIDS Programs have been doing concerning the current pandemic. It also aims to solicit feedback from concerned stakeholders, government officials and agencies, affected communities, and from the general public which will feed into public policy.

To attain this objective, the UP CIDS COVID-19 webinar series is divided into four parts of which are the following:

- 1.) Governance Cluster
 - Strategic Studies Program
 - Program on Data Science for Public Policy
 - Program on Social and Political Change
- 2.) Education Cluster (ACTRP, HERPRP, ERP)
 - Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Center
 - Education Research Program
 - Program on Higher Education Research and Policy Reform
- 3.) Health Cluster
 - Decolonial Studies Program
 - Program on Health Systems Development
- 4.) Development Cluster
 - Program on Alternative Development
 - Political Economy Program
 - Escaping the Middle-Income Trap Chains for Change

Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, Ph.D.

Executive Director

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OVERVIEW

“The Role of Social Sciences in COVID-19 Responses in the Philippines: A Case Study of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS)”¹

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Background

This overview on the “Role of Social Sciences in COVID-19 Responses in the Philippines” focuses on the experience of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS). Established in 1985, the UP CIDS is the research policy unit of the University of the Philippines System.³ It currently

1 This “Overview” is an expanded version of the author’s article “The Philippines: The Role of Social Sciences in COVID-19 Responses in the Philippines: A Case Study of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS)” in the compendium *Social Science and COVID-19: The South east Asia Response* (Tadem 2022).

2 The author is the Executive Director of the UP CIDS.

3 The UP System has eight constituent units.

has 12 programs which are divided into three clusters. The Education and Capacity-Building Cluster is composed of these four programs: (a) the Education Research Program (ERP); (b) the Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program (HERPRP); (c) the Assessment, Curriculum, and Technology Research Program (ACTRP); and (d) the Data Science for Public Policy Program (DSPPP).

In the second cluster, the Development Cluster, the programs that form part of it are: (a) the Program on Escaping the Middle Income Trap: Chains for Change (EMIT:C4C); (b) the Political Economy Program (PEP); (c) the Program on Alternative Development (AltDev); and (d) the Program on Health Systems Development (PHSD). Finally, four programs form part of the Social, Political and Cultural Studies Cluster: (a) the Program on Social and Political Change (PSCP); (b) the Islamic Studies Program (ISP); (c) the Strategic Studies Program (SSP); and (d) the Decolonial Studies Program (DSP).

The University of the Philippines (UP), which is the premier national state university in the country, generally has close links with government agencies with regards to policy-making. The UP College of Medicine, UP Manila, and the tertiary state-owned Philippine General Hospital, which is administered by UP Manila, feed into the policies of the Department of Health. The UP College of Law has a close working relationship with the Department of Justice. With regards to economic-policy making, faculty from the University of the Philippines School of Economics (UPSE), are called to head the country's key economic agencies as well as contracted as consultants, e.g., for the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA). The same can be said for the UP College of Education, whose faculty have taken on key positions as well as are contracted as consultants for the Department of Education. The current pandemic has magnified the role which the UP can play in addressing such a situation.

This paper will, thus, look at how the social sciences, through UP, have been harnessed towards this end. It has chosen to do this using the UP CIDS as its case study. Aside from being the policy unit of the UP System, UP CIDS also presents a gamut of programs that cover the various aspects of the pandemic which has impacted the lives of the

Filipino people. This paper will show the experience that UP CIDS shares with regards to how the social sciences are/were mobilized during the COVID-19 pandemic to bring forth important and relevant views on this subject matter as well as valuable insights on the role of the social sciences in this crucial period. More importantly, it also seeks to enhance further how the social sciences can be further pushed into the forefront in addressing the issues and challenges which have been posed by the COVID-19 problem.

As this paper is part of a bigger research project on “The Role of Social Sciences in COVID-19 Responses in the ASEAN Region,”⁴ it will address three major themes of the research project, which include the following:

- 1.) the **inclusion** of social scientists in scientific commissions or ad hoc advisory bodies set up to support COVID-19 responses, at different levels of governance, if applicable;
- 2.) the emergence of research funding **opportunities** and research agendas for COVID research in the social sciences, from national and international sources; and
- 3.) initiatives involving social scientists at **different levels** within the framework of COVID-19 response planning and implementation, or evaluation, at the national and subnational level (Global Development Network and the Asia Research Unit, University of Indonesia, “The Role of Social Sciences in COVID-19 Responses in the ASEAN Region,” August 8, 2021, document).

In terms of the methodology, this paper relies mainly on the UP CIDS midyear and year-end reports, from 2020 onwards, of its 12 programs concerning COVID-19-related documents as well as UP CIDS primary documents.

4 This project is funded by the Global Development Network and the Asia Research Unit, University of Indonesia (ARU UI).

I. The Inclusion of Social Scientists in Scientific Commissions or Ad Hoc Advisory Bodies

When Metro Manila went on lockdown last March 16, 2020, the UP CIDS research programs:

in response to the COVID-19 situation, needed to assess the feasibility of various components of their respective research agendas for 2020: (a) existing activities and projects which need to be postponed or canceled; (b) those which may be linked with the COVID-19 emergency situation; and (c) new activities and projects which directly involve and address COVID-19 and its effects. These were all taken into consideration by early April. (UP CIDS 2020, 36)

Of the 12 UP CIDS programs, the five Programs that were directly linked to scientific commissions or ad hoc advisory bodies, i.e., government agencies, were the following: (1) the Program on Health and Systems Development (PHSD); (2) Escaping the Middle Income Trap Chains for Change (EMIT:C4C); (3) the Data Science for Public Policy Program (DSPPP); and, (4) the Assessment Curriculum, Technology, and Research Program (ACTRP).

A. The Program on Health and Systems Development (PHSD)

As addressing health issues is one of the major concerns brought forth by COVID-19, it was only inevitable that the Program on Health and Systems Development (PHSD) would be drawn into various government agencies in this time of the pandemic. The PHSD's main focus is to bring forth innovative solutions to the health systems in the country with a focus on primary care systems and monitor the impact of health system reform in urban/ corporate, rural, and remote settings under its flagship project on Philippine Primary Care Studies (PPCS).⁵ The COVID-19 health crisis brought forth the tweaking of solutions to address pandemic concerns impinging on the primary care systems. Due to the increasing cases of COVID-19 in the country, PPCS continued its employment of teletriage and

telemedicine in all of its study sites in Samal, Bataan); Bulusan, Sorsogon, and the University Health Service of UP Diliman in Quezon City.

The link of the PHSD to government agencies is established by the nature of their funding, of which 93% is externally funded by the following agencies: (1) the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth),⁶ (2) the Department of Science and Technology's Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (DOST-PCHRD),⁷ and (3) the Department of Health (DOH)'s Advancing Health through Evidence-Assisted Decisions with Health Policy and Systems Research (AHEAD-HPSR) Program.

Unlike the other UP CIDS programs which are constituted by social scientists, the PHSD is headed by medical doctors who are also faculty members of the UP College of Medicine. PHSD is, therefore, the "odd-Program-out" among the UP CIDS programs as it is not generally social science-based. The program, however, preferred UP CIDS as its home base as it wanted an academic unit that would be "multidisciplinary" to enrich its perspectives on health. This is especially so that it is dealing with local government units (LGUs) and its local officials for its primary health care centers in the provinces. On a more practical level, PHSD funding is also meant to service the University Health Service (UHS) in UP Diliman as a primary health care unit. As UP CIDS is based in UP Diliman, it is easier, by proximity, to deal with the UPHS, which was the case before the pandemic.

5 The PPCS is a series of quasi-experimental pilot studies in representative settings in the Philippines: corporate, rural, and geographically isolated disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). The PHSD also conducts studies, surveys, and data mining on health systems enhancements and outcome measures such as patient satisfaction, knowledge and quality of primary care, financial risk protection, and administrative efficiency (UP CIDS, [2019]).

6 PhilHealth (2014) establishes its agency mandate: "The National Health Insurance Program was established to provide health insurance coverage and ensure affordable, available, accessible health care services for all citizens of the Philippines."

7 The DOST-PCHRD (2012) is mandated to formulate policies, projects and strategies for health and science and technology development.

B. The Program on Escaping the Middle-Income Trap: Chains for Change (EMIT:C4C)

Managing the economy is another major concern during the pandemic. Health specialists and economists in government agencies are often in a debate with regards to whether the country, specifically, the National Capital Region, i.e., Metro Manila, should be under an enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), i.e., lockdown, or not. Health specialists and health workers generally go for the former while the economists, together with the business community, go for the latter. The government's economic planning agencies argue that going through a "lockdown" will result in income losses of billions of pesos as well as massive unemployment. For the Department of Health (DOH) as well as hospitals, however, an ECQ is needed to arrest the surge of COVID-19 infections to give a "breathing" space for hospitals and their health care workers who can hardly cope up with the demands for hospital rooms, intensive care units (ICUs) and other health services.

The contribution of EMIT:C4C, whose mandate is to examine "inclusiveness and competitiveness in its research and societal efforts" with a focus on "... big data analytics on manufacturing and exports, action research on agriculture and fisheries value chains and action research on business for peace." Regarding the need to address these dilemmas, EMIT:C4C sought to examine the impact of the pandemic on the business sector.

EMIT:C4C was part of the government's effort to establish the Advanced Information Integration Platform (AIIP), which aimed to pool together all the information needed to address issues brought forth by the pandemic. These include health, economic, security, and social concerns. Noting that in any crisis, the availability of accurate and complete information is crucial, it aimed to come out with just one repository so that various groups can benefit from a holistic multidimensional view (Balaoing 2020). The University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD), on the other hand, set up a multidisciplinary team composed of economists, industrial engineers, statisticians, computational scientists, and public administration

experts to coordinate with the government on this effort (Balaoing 2020).

In June 2020, EMIT:C4C held a high-level meeting attended by top officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the University of the Philippines. where it presented the BayanAnihan app and explained how data on farmers and fisherfolks will be integrated into the data lake initiative of the Data Science para sa Bayan (Data Science for the Nation) or DSPB (UP CIDS 2021b).

C. The Data Science Program for Public Policy (DSPPP)

Closely working with EMIT in spearheading the creation of the AIIP, is the UP CIDS Data Science on Public Policy Program (DSPPP) whose mandate is “to build the capacity of the University of the Philippines (UP) faculty in data science towards application in public policy and governance.” The AIIP emerged as a multisectoral collaboration between the government, the academe, the private sector, and volunteer individuals to help plug numerous information gaps in the country’s COVID-19 response. This endeavor aims to build a “data lake” attempt to provide real-time data for evidence-based policymaking in addressing the effects of COVID-19 in the Philippines (UP CIDS 2020, 3). An example of this was EMIT’s and DSPPP’s participation in the pilot testing of the Data Lake–Department of Agriculture applications in San Jose, Nueva Ecija. The application is used for registering residents in the area, as well as for the survey of its rice supply (UP CIDS 2020). Another objective of the DSPPP and EMIT:C4C in developing a “data lake” with the DTI-BOI and the DICT was to push forward a “One UP” brand in response to COVID-19. This data lake intended to generate useful data to help address socio-economic issues due to COVID-19. This was also to feed to the University of the Philippines Diliman COVID-19 Task Force where the project also contributed to local responses against the pandemic (UP CIDS 2020).

D. The Assessment, Curriculum, and Technology Research Program (ACTRP)

Although the health and economy sectors dominate the major concerns of the Philippine government in these pandemic times, not trailing far behind is the education sector. As students could no longer have face-to-face meetings with their teachers at all levels, there was a sudden shift to online learning and teaching modules. This was something that the educational system was certainly not prepared for. Among the UP CIDS programs, the Assessment, Curriculum, and Technology Research Program (ACTRP) is at the forefront in helping the Department of Education (DepEd) look for solutions to educational problems brought forth by the COVID-19 crisis. ACTRP's mandate advises and informs the Philippine education system through curriculum teaching, and assessment research that is based on empirical studies of curriculum innovation and implementation (UP CIDS 2021b).

Unlike the other UP CIDS Program, ACTRP's directive is determined by the Assessment Research Center (ARC) University of Melbourne (UoM). This is because 100% of ACTRP's funding comes from the ARC UoM through the Australian Development of Foreign Affairs and Trade and its partner institution, the University of the Philippines. For 2020, its other external funders included the Australian Council for Education Research and the Palladium Global Philippines. At present, ACTRP focuses on reviewing the K-12 basic education curriculum. With the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, ACTRP assists in the capacity-building activities of DepEd to support its Learning Continuity Plan. This requires teachers to focus on MELCs (Most Essential Learning Capacities) and "prepares for distance and blended teaching and learning modalities due to COVID-19 restrictions" (UP CIDS 2020, 18).

The UP CIDS programs, i.e., the PHSD, EMIT:C4C, DSPPP, and ACTRP, which were pulled into scientific commissions or ad hoc advisory bodies, had the technical skills and capacity to address the needs of the health, economy, and education sectors. Their inclusion in these commissions or advisory bodies was facilitated by their

sources of funding, e.g., PHSD and ACTRP as well as establishing networks they already had even before the pandemic. This applied to all of these four programs. In the cases of the PHSD and ACTRP, it was also a matter of tweaking what they were already doing to address the pandemic. Meanwhile, the EMIT:C4C and the DSPPP embarked on something new, i.e., the establishment of an AIIP/data lake to unify information to feed into the various sectors of society to address COVID-19 concerns.

II. The Emergence of Research Funding Opportunities and Research Agendas for COVID Research in the Social Sciences

Based on the UP CIDS experience, it did help that there were already social science-based research programs that were funded by the university, which enabled it to segue and to attend to the pressing issues and concerns of the pandemic. The challenge to this situation, however, was that funding, which the UP CIDS Program earmarked to do fieldwork in the Philippines, could not be done due to the COVID-19 government travel restrictions. This actually led to the cancellation of UP CIDS programs that need data-gathering and research validation from the field. UP CIDS's funding is covered by government rules as these funds come from the public's money through taxes and are allocated to the university. There were also, of course, risks involved in conducting face-to-face interviews with stakeholders. External funds to the programs helped in this area, among others, as these activities were not covered by certain government restrictions such as travel, enabling the PHSD as well as ISP program personnel to visit communities in the provinces. Despite all of these, however, the UP CIDS Programs proceeded to tweak their respective Program agenda to address COVID-19 concerns.

For 2020, the year when the COVID-19 pandemic began, 63.05% of the UP CIDS's total project was generated externally, i.e., outside of the annual funds given by the University of the Philippines (UP), and 36.95% was generated by UP (UP CIDS 2020, 73). Although

it is not clear what percentage of these funds went to the study of the political, economic, and socio-cultural impact of COVID-19, these funds enabled the UP CIDS Programs to pursue this study by embedding this in previous funded studies and embarking on new ones. This was seen in the following UP CIDS programs:

A. The UP CIDS Education and Capacity-Building Cluster

Given its mandate to contribute to the deeper understanding of education issues in the context of current issues shaping the academic landscape as well as “the nurturing, encouragement, and support of faculty researchers on education,” the Education Research Program (ERP) modified its intended research for 2020 to include issues and concerns stemming from the implications of the pandemic to the education sector. The areas of curriculum, assessment, learning delivery, teacher development, school leadership, and governance concerns were “reevaluated as health protocols such as community quarantines, physical distancing, and prohibition of gatherings are being enforced” (UP CIDS 2020, 9). An example of this was ERP’s project “Policy Research on Flexible Learning Options for Senior High School” (SHS). This project was “conducted on existing policies on education in emergencies (EiE), use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to deliver education to children affected by crises and flexible learning option (FLOs) to map out possibilities in using alternative educational strategies to deliver to SHS education in the Philippines in the time of COVID-19 and beyond (10). The ERP also translated into Filipino resources on mental health and psychosocial support during the pandemic. This included translating the *UP College of Education COVID-19 Dictionary for Children* into Singubuanong Binisaya. The Program also developed instructional videos for learners, teachers, and parents for remote learning (13).

There were also externally funded pre-pandemic research projects that ERP was able to tweak to address COVID-19 issues. An example of this was the UK Research Innovation–Global Challenges Research Fund or UKRI–GCRF Project Study in collaboration with the

University of Oxford. This three-year project focuses on supporting oral language development among early learners and the research procedures for this study include COVID-19 considerations (UP CIDS 2020).

The **Program on Higher Education and Policy Reform (HERPRP)** complemented the COVID-19 social science research being undertaken by the ERP and its target stakeholders the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Conceived as a program “to chart a research agenda and systematically build an evidence base for policy analysis, and create a network of experts,” HERPRP embarked on data-gathering and research for policy papers with regards to the interventions made by HEIs to deliver better for their constituencies during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.” It also sought “. . . to document the content of pandemic-related higher education policies, as well as current and future initiatives and innovations of HEIs” (UP CIDS 2021b, 19).

B. The UP CIDS Development Cluster

In the UP CIDS Development Cluster, complementing the research thrust of EMIT is the **Political Economy Program (PEP)**, which “examines the interaction between state and market as well as facilitating academe-government-industry-civil society linkages aimed at promoting innovation-driven and equitable development.” In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program looked at the impact of the pandemic on domestic industries, e.g., micro, small, and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) in particular and the Philippine economy and society in general.” It also researched “the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal sector workers,” whereby it examined and identified gaps in existing social protection programs, ‘which are largely limited to regular employment in the formal sector,’ and proposed more inclusive long-term measures” (UP CIDS 2021b, 30). These cover improvements to programs on social assistance and insurance, capacity-building, and the labor market. A third research project focused on enabling Philippine agriculture to address the pandemic whose recommendations covered “improvements to the

movement of agricultural commodities, support for small producers and agro-enterprises, and development of the sector to become more resilient to disruptions” (30).

The **Program on Alternative Development (AltDev)**, is also concerned with development issues like EMIT:C4C and PEP, and its mandate focuses on “paradigms, policies, practices, and projects that are largely marginalized and excluded from the mainstream.” Furthermore, it seeks “to bring these alternatives from the margins into the mainstream and level the playing field so that these may be regarded on equal footing with dominant discourses and thus offer alternatives to the existing system” (UP CIDS 2021b, 33). AltDev’s COVID-19 research focused “on examining the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis on marginalized sectors and communities and on documenting their alternative practices in confronting the pandemic” (33). Its research is not only limited to the Philippines but includes the rest of the Southeast Asian region. The program also continued its “participatory research and engagement with AltDev’s grassroots and community partners and these were conducted through remote means of communication, such as video and phone calls, online chat groups, and email. *Kumustahan* (How are you?) or catch-up sessions were also conducted to check both on the situation of partners and to track the progress of the participatory documentation projects” (33). On the regional front, AltDev embarked on its “Southeast Asian Community and Grassroots Responses in COVID-19 Times” on May 2020 which documented the impacts of and responses of COVID-19 in different marginalized communities across Southeast Asia.

As for previous research partners giving funding to UP CIDS Programs to pursue COVID-19 research, an example of this was the UNESCO Paris commissioned research for the AltDev Program to do a project on “Promoting Evidence to Promote Equitable COVID-19 Response and Recovery Policies in the Philippines.” Previously, AltDev already had a working relationship with UNESCO Jakarta and the Philippine Commission for UNESCO or UNACOM with regards to research projects in 2017 and 2019, respectively (UP CIDS 2017, 2020, 2021a). The UNESCO project stipulated that AltDev

disseminate its findings in two webinars. One webinar was to share its findings to grassroots communities and civil society organizations and the other was for concerned government agencies and a press conference. The AltDev program, as required by UNESCO, also held a press conference to disseminate its findings.

AltDev also had a Lawan project (this means “struggle” in Bahasa Indonesia) which produced documentaries and podcasts on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on grassroots organizations which was funded by another pre-pandemic partner 11.11.11, which is a coalition of NGOs, unions, movements and various solidarity groups in Flander. In 2020, the Lawan project was funded by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS).

Another example of a UP CIDS Program commissioned by a previous partner to do quick research on the impact of the pandemic was the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC) PSPC. The International Democracy and Electoral Assessment (IDEA)⁸ commissioned PSPC to assess how the pandemic affected the performance of the 1987 Philippine Constitution (UP CIDS 2021b, 44). A third example is the Strategic Studies Program (SSP), which would continue to receive assistance from the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Philippines to fund its annual Katipunan Conferences on Philippine external relations and strategic concerns and the publications which would come out of this. With KAS funding, the SSP featured in its 2020 conference paper presentations the impact of COVID-19 on Philippine foreign relations and regional security. And lastly, a fourth example was ERP, which consolidated its partnership on April 24, 2020, with the Knowledge Channel Foundation, Inc. to focus this on research with regards to early literacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were also new research partnerships forged to embark on social science research on the pandemic. The Office of the Vice President of the Philippines (OVP), for example, solicited the help of the ERP together with the UP College of

8 IDEA is an “intergovernmental organization that works to support and strengthen democratic institutions and processes around the world to develop sustainable, effective and legislative democracies” (ACE Project, n.d.).

Education to help identify with other stakeholders and develop instructional video topics and subject matter for online learning. This was part of the OVP's "Bayanihan E-skwela" (Community schooling). ERP developed this video together with faculty from the UP College of Education faculty which aimed "to support the needs of teachers, parents, and learners on distance or remote learning."

C. Social, Political, and Cultural Studies Cluster

The UP CIDS Social, Political, and Cultural Studies Cluster, like its counterparts in the Education and Capacity-Building Cluster and Development Cluster, also tweaked its research projects to address pandemic concerns. The Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC), for example, which is tasked to understand "the varied social and political challenges facing modern Philippine society and polity from a multidisciplinary perspective" "reshaped its focus and took on projects and activities examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Philippine society and polity" (UP CIDS 2021b, 47). The Islamic Studies Program (ISP), whose mandate is "to advance the critical and strategic role of Islam in nation-building to move communities toward a deeper understanding and appreciation of Islam and to establish appropriate responses to Islamophobia, explored institutional mechanisms for 'the new normal' in Islamic education and for Halal institutions" (51). Complementing the efforts of the UP CIDS ISP in doing COVID-19 studies, which is taking into consideration the social and cultural impact of the pandemic, is the UP CIDS Decolonial Studies Program (DSP). The DSP explored the interactions between community health workers and indigenous/traditional healers towards cost-effective amplification of public health messaging" (57). Of consideration is its interrogation of coloniality that involves identifying aspects of Western modernity in postcolonial states, focusing on contemporary public health interventions (57). And lastly, the external impact of the pandemic of the Philippines was examined by the UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program (SSP). In particular, the SSP, which "aims to promote interest and discourse on significant changes in Philippine foreign policy and develop capacity-building for strategic studies in the country"

(55), focused its research on regional transformations and how they impact both questions of security and the regional security architecture at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thus, as noted earlier on, the UP CIDS Program, in the Education and Capacity-Building Cluster, the Development Cluster, and the Social, Political and Cultural Studies Cluster, which were not generally pulled into scientific commissions/or ad hoc advisory bodies were still able to address COVID-19-related concerns because of funding from the university and/or external-funding. The challenge for these programs now is on their ability disseminate this within society. It is thus pertinent to look at how these UP CIDS Programs intervene at different levels within the framework of COVID-19 demands.

III. Initiatives Involving Social Scientists at Different Levels Within the Framework of COVID-19 Response, Planning, and Implementation or Evaluation, at National and Sub-National Level

For UP CIDS, as important as pursuing research and COVID-19 related activities is the networking with government agencies, the private sector, the academe, and civil society in addressing the challenges brought forth by the pandemic. What facilitated this was the establishment of UP CIDS's institutional reach before the pandemic. UP CIDS was able to utilize this reach for its COVID-19 studies. From January to June 2021, UP CIDS programs collaborated with the following:

- 1.) 82 public institutions, i.e., 28 local government units, 55 University of the Philippines (UP) units, and 1 public non-UP institutions; and,
- 2.) 77 private institutions, i.e., 41 local private institutions; 35 international organizations; and 1 private education institution.

With regards to the UP CIDS linkages and reach, these included the following:

- 1.) 151 public institutions, i.e., 27 local government units; 2 embassies; 61 government agencies; 54 public educational institutions; and 7 student organizations;
- 2.) 188 private institutions, i.e., 121 civil society organizations; 27 corporate business entities, 1 foundation, and 39 educational institutions; and
- 3.) 66 international organizations. (UP CIDS 2021a, 92)

UP CIDS has also tapped partners in sharing and collaboration in its pandemic research. Among its valuable partners are the executive branch, i.e., the Office of the Vice President and government agencies such as the (a) Commission on Higher Education (CHED); (b) the Department of Education (DepEd) Bureau of Learning and Development (BLD) and DepEd Bureau of Curriculum Development (BCD); (c) the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI Board of Investments and Bureau of Small and Medium Enterprises (BSME); (d) the Department of Agriculture (DA); (e) the Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT); (f) the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA); (g) the Department of Science and Technology (DOST); (g) Land Bank of the Philippines; (h) the Department of Health (DOH); (i) Philippine Health and Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth); and (j) Department of Science and Technology–Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (DOST-PCHRD). UP CIDS’s research was also formally disseminated to local governments and communities in Piddig, Ilocos Norte (EMIT:C4C) as well as in Samal, Bataan and Bulusan, Sorsogon (PHSD). Embassies also partnered with UP CIDS Programs for funding and dissemination of COVID-19 research outputs such as the Embassy of the Netherlands (EMIT:C4C). As for international agencies, these included UNESCO Paris, UNCTAD, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Academic institutions were also reliable partners in collaborating with and disseminating the research findings of UP

CIDS programs. Within UP Diliman, UP CIDS programs partnered with the UPD COVID-19 Task Force, the College of Education, the Department of Political Science, the Institute of Islamic Studies, UP School of Economics, UP College of Social Work and Community Development (UP CSWCD), the Institute of Small Scale Industries (ISSI), and the School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR). Outside UP Diliman, UP CIDS also partnered with the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities (PACU), as well as foreign academic institutions, such as the University of Melbourne, Oxford University, and Nagoya University. UP CIDS programs also worked with nongovernment organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and grassroots communities, among others.

UP CIDS Programs embarked on many activities with these aforementioned partners. The HERPRP linked up with the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities (PACU) to come out with a compendium based on the PACU's webinars regarding web and internet protocol security and a manual for higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines in a pandemic. HERPRP also held a "virtual roadshow" with the Committee on Higher and Technical Education of the Philippine Congress's House of Representatives on September 21, 2020. The issues discussed included "the dire situation of private HEIs, the realignment of budget for scholarships to make way for funds for COVID-19 response, the danger of contractual HEI workers losing their jobs, and concerns on the coverage of the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) Program" (UP CIDS 2021b, 17).

Meanwhile, EMIT:C4C brought in DSPPP to some of its activities particularly with regards to the establishment of a data lake. These were mainly with the DTI-BOI, DICT, and the Department of Agriculture (DA). First, EMIT:C4C led a multi-stakeholder collaboration on big data in partnership with different government agencies, the private sector, civil service organizations, and different offices of the University of the Philippines. The collaboration was dubbed "Data Science para sa Bayan (DSPB)" ("Data Science for the Nation"). This endeavor entails the setup of a data lake that will contain real-time information to inform public policy on the pandemic; Second, EMIT:C4C presented a study on the rice industry

and the COVID-19 pandemic to UP School of Economics professors; Mayor Eduardo Guillen of Piddig, Ilocos Norte; government officials; and representatives from the private sector.

In June 2020, EMIT:C4C also held a high-level meeting attended by top officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the DTI, and the University of the Philippines. EMIT:C4C presented the BayanAnihan app and explained how data on farmers and fisherfolks will be integrated into the data lake initiative of the DSPB (UP CIDS 2021b). This CIDS program, in September 2020, also networked with its partners, the Hinelaban Foundation in Mindanao, Business for Peace, and the Dutch Embassy, to organize a discussion of the pandemic and “its effects on livelihood, peace, and other aspects of life in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.” The BARMM is one of the field sites of EMIT:C4C. With EMIT:C4C, the DSPPP participated in the pilot testing of the Data Lake–Department of Agriculture applications in San Jose, Nueva Ecija. The application is used for registering residents in the area, as well as for the survey of its rice supply. The DSPPP also tackled the various efforts in using data science in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic by convening the UP Data Science Working Group (DSWG) (UP CIDS 2021b).

With regards to PEP, for its research project to assist MSMEs in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, it held a roundtable discussion on October 8, 2020, in collaboration with the UP Institute of Small-Scale Industries (ISSI). In the roundtable discussion,

[o]fficials from government agencies such as the Department of Trade and Industry’s Bureau of Small and Medium Enterprise Development, the Department of Science and Technology, and the Land Bank of the Philippines discussed the services that aim to help MSMEs. Small business owners also shared their issues and concerns. With regards to its collaboration with United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), PEP participated in a preparatory forum that tackled the pandemic’s impact on global trade and development and to the reframing of the UNCTAD negotiations. (UP CIDS 2021b, 32)

This involved PEP’s continuing engagement with UNCTAD, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), and other stakeholders for the Fifteenth Session of the UNCTAD (UNCTAD XV), which was rescheduled to October 2021.

The Program on Alternative Development (AltDev) continued its participatory research, and engagements with AltDev’s grassroots and community partners were conducted through remote means of communication such as video and phone calls, online chat groups, and email. *Kumustahan* (How are you?), or catch-up sessions, were also conducted both to check on the situation of partners and to track the progress of the participatory research (UP CIDS 2021b).

With regards to the AltDev Program webinar series for its UNESCO project on “Promoting Evidence to Promote Equitable COVID-19 Response and Recovery Policies in the Philippines,” the December 11 webinar for government agencies was attended by the following: (1) the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), (2) the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), (3) the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), (4) the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), (5) the Department of Education (DepEd), (6) the Department of Tourism (DOT), (7) the Department of Social Work and Development (DSWD), (8) the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and (9) the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).

As for the PHSD, its program co-convener Dr. Jose Rafael Marfori had a face-to-face meeting from August 6 to 9, 2020, with Sorsogon governor Francis Escudero and provincial government officials to discuss the possible activation of primary care in the province. Four areas that were tackled include the deployment of PhilHealth’s eKonsulta module, equipment and connectivity, training on the use of electronic health records (HER), and COVID-19 response and contact tracing (UP CIDS 2021b).

The PSPC partnered again with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in a research collaboration that focused this time on how the pandemic affected the performance of the 1987 Philippine Constitution (UP

CIDS 2021b). The PSPC and IDEA launched the “Constitutional Performance Assessment in the Time of a Pandemic: The 1987 Constitution and the Philippines’ COVID-19 Response” Technical Paper. IDEA also invited PSPC Convenor Dr. Maria Ela L. Atienza to be a speaker in the 2020 Melbourne Forum on Constitution-Building in Asia and the Pacific, a forum that IDEA co-organized with the Constitution Transformation Network of the University of Melbourne. Dr. Atienza presented the Philippine case of emergency powers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. She illustrated the constitutionality of the temporary emergency powers granted to President Rodrigo Duterte and its impact on the country’s COVID-19 response. Also discussed were the various forms of oversight on emergency powers and the government’s overall pandemic response (UP CIDS 2021b, 50).

Dissemination of UP CIDS programs’ research on COVID-19 through webinars/podcasts. UP CIDS generally disseminated its findings through webinars. An example of this was AltDev’s “catch-up session” on Kwentong Kwarantín (Stories While in Quarantine). This is an online podcast series that seeks to discuss issues affecting Philippine society during the implementation of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in Luzon due to COVID-19 (UP CIDS 2020). In addition, the PSPC launched its *Ugnayang Migrante* (Migration Issues and Concerns) podcast series, which explored “burning issues concerning Filipino migrants and discussed in many ways international migration from the Philippines has been/is being shaped and re-shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic” (UP CIDS 2021a, 64).

On the regional front, AltDev embarked on its “Southeast Asian Community and Grassroots Responses in COVID-19 Times” in May 2020, which documented the impacts of COVID-19 on different marginalized communities across Southeast Asia and their responses to this pandemic. Independent initiatives undertaken by AltDev partner organizations and civil society networks during the COVID-19 crisis were also documented (UP CIDS 2020). A webinar was also held on September 30, 2020, entitled “Grassroots Initiatives in the Midst of a Global Pandemic,” in which grassroots organizations

and communities participated. The webinar brought together various organizations, allowing them to share responses to the COVID-19 pandemic:

This webinar was organized by the Tifa Foundation, an organization based in Indonesia, that promotes the creation of an open society through cooperation on strategic issues with various civil society organizations both at the national and local levels. AltDev discussed the struggles and remarkable work of the Back Pack Health Worker Team, Mae Tao Clinic, Bakwit School, Homenet Southeast Asia, KPRI, and Igting in mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The presentation was an output from the AltDev's Project on Alternative Practices in Southeast Asia and COVID-19 Watch. (UP CIDS 2021b, 38)

AltDev also disseminated its research on community practices and initiatives across Southeast Asia in the context of the pandemic through lecture invitations. An example of this was when it was invited by the University of Mindanao to speak on "COVID-19 Impact and Grassroots Resilience: Cases of the Philippines and Southeast Asia" on November 29, 2020. The four case studies presented were a women-led community enterprise in a relocation site in Bulacan; the harrowing situation of the Ayta Mag-indi community in Porac, Pampanga; the plight of students and teachers of the Save Our Schools Network; and agrarian struggles in Thailand and Timor Leste (UP CIDS 2021b).

On August 6, 2020, the PSPC held a webinar on "Constitutional Performance in the Time of a Pandemic: The 1987 Constitution and the Philippines' COVID-19 Response." This webinar "served as an opportunity to initiate discussions with policymakers, researchers, civil society, media, and students on how to keep the Constitution working during periods of emergencies and what needs to be changed or improved not only at the level of the Constitution, but also at the level of common legislation and implementation."

The UP CIDS also sponsored a COVID-19 webinar series, in which the Center's programs participated. The UP CIDS COVID-19

Development Cluster held a webinar on the “Southeast Asian People’s Alternatives in Pandemic Times” last March 9, 2021, and another one on “COVID-19 and the Economy: Challenges and Opportunities” last April 8, 2021. The UP CIDS COVID-19 Governance Cluster, on the other hand, sponsored a webinar on “Multilevel Crisis Governance: International and Philippines Responses and Prospects in the Midst of Pandemic Challenges” last April 29, 2021. And lastly, the UP CIDS COVID-19 Education Cluster webinar on “Making Our Way Back to the Classroom” “tackled how schools, from basic education to higher education, are coping with the challenges of the pandemic and preparing for the return to face-to-face learning.” The speakers in this webinar were government officials from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Department of Education (DepEd), and the Technical and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).⁹

UP CIDS publications on the pandemic. The UP CIDS webinars and podcasts were complemented by other forms of social media dissemination and publications, i.e., policy briefs, discussion papers, monographs, and journal articles for the UP CIDS’s *Philippine Journal of Public Policy*. These helped in disseminating the findings of the CIDS research programs. All of these could be accessed on the UP CIDS website (<https://cids.up.edu.ph>) and on other UP CIDS social media platforms, e.g., Facebook.

Conclusion: Insights and Challenges

The UP CIDS experience, thus, shows the important role which the social sciences play in COVID-19 responses in the Philippines. The particular sectors focused on are the following: education, data science, development, i.e., the economy and health, governance, strategic studies, Islamic issues and concerns, and alternatives to Western perspectives on the pandemic. As seen in the concept note, the studies they pursued provided inputs to the executive and

⁹ UP CIDS programs’ podcasts on the pandemic can be accessed via <https://cids.up.edu.ph/>.

legislative branches of government, international organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, e.g., micro, small and medium-scale industries, NGOs, civil society, and grassroots communities, among others.

What helped mobilize the 12 UP CIDS programs towards this end were the following:

- 1.) The University of the Philippines (UP) provided the academic infrastructure for the Programs to pursue their research on the pandemic, e.g., funding and the program personnel.
- 2.) The programs, during the pre-pandemic period, had already established their respective stakeholders and networks that became the focus of their COVID-19 research outputs. More importantly, these stakeholders and networks also provided them with the needed inputs to do their research.
- 3.) Funding also came from external agencies, which have already previously funded research activities of UP CIDS's program. This time, the funding agencies wanted them to focus on the pandemic.
- 4.) New partners and funding agencies emerged, and they needed the assistance of the UP CIDS programs.
- 5.) It was also noted that since the UP CIDS programs are university-based, the programs' research activities gain some sense of "credibility" with regard to the studies on the pandemic. The fact that the programs were approached by and listened to by policy makers as well as by the private sector, civil society, the academic community, and media, may very well attest to this.
- 6.) Being university-based also draws in external funders, whose funding sometimes necessitates that the implementers of their research projects should be an academic institutions and recognize their "expertise" in social science research.
- 7.) It also helped that UP CIDS was also able to disseminate their research findings through various means, e.g., webinars, roundtable discussions, podcasts, press briefings, weblogs

and online and print publications, and dissemination of research findings and activities through social media platforms. Dissemination through social media was picked up by other academic institutions and international and local NGOs, which asked permission to post the UP CIDS's research on their website or publish this too.

The relevance of social science topics during the pandemic.

The UP CIDS experience also bring forth the realities of the role the social sciences play during the pandemic. For policy makers, priority is given to the health science, rather than the social sciences, as seen in the experience of the PHSD. As noted, the PHSD has the most external funding among the UP CIDS programs as well as collaboration with government agencies and local government units. As for the social sciences, EMIT:C4C and the DSPPP get pulled into collaborations with government agencies and local government units (LGUs) because of their technical expertise needed by the economy. Health and economic concerns and the technical expertise to address these also reflect the major concerns of the Philippine government.

PEP also engages the government agencies but not in the realm of technical expertise. It instead focuses more on the issues and concerns of the MSMEs and how these can survive the pandemic. PEP also introduces another important economic issue, i.e., global trade in a time of pandemic and how this particularly affects developing countries like the Philippines, which is a UNCTAD concern. For AltDev, on the other hand, the development concern is with regards to the state of grassroots communities not only in the Philippines but also across the Southeast Asian region. It sees the need to strengthen the solidarity of networks across the regime and their respective communities to confront the challenges of the pandemic.

Closely following health and economic concerns is education. The technical expertise of ACTRP, for example, is needed, and its research work is externally funded to assist the technical needs of the Department of Education. This is also seen with ERP and its collaboration with the Office of the Vice President of the Philippines

in coming out with distance-learning teaching modules. The ERP, like the HERPRP, also engages in social science research which looks at the impact of the pandemic on education and how their studies can mitigate its adverse effects.

The UP CIDS Social, Political, and Cultural Studies Cluster, unlike the development and education clusters, introduces social science issues, which are generally not the priorities of policy makers in addressing pandemic needs but are very important to take into consideration. In the case of the PSPC, for example, this issue is assessing governance in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. More often than not, the problems which have arisen during this pandemic are due to weak governance structures. The lack of contact tracing, the slow vaccine rollout, and corruption with regards to the use of government funds for COVID-19 purposes are among the examples of the lack of governance in addressing pressing concerns. As for the ISP, it brings out the important issue of the need to bring forth ethnic considerations in the manner in which the pandemic is being addressed. And lastly, the SSP highlights the pertinence of looking at how the country's external relations have been adversely affected by the pandemic and how to address this. It also examines the bigger picture of the possible reconfiguring of geostrategic concerns as brought about by the COVID-19 crisis.

Another reality confronted by the UP CIDS is that the pandemic has also hampered embarking on fieldwork, which for some of the programs is badly needed to generate data on the impact of the pandemic on their stakeholders in both Metro Manila, the provinces, and in Southeast Asia. Moreover, with regards to the social dissemination of UP CIDS pandemic activities, one also cannot measure at the moment the impact it has made on policy-making.

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN PEOPLES' ALTERNATIVES IN PANDEMIC TIMES

DEVELOPMENT CLUSTER, PART I



RATIONALE

The University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) is the policy research unit of the University of the Philippines. Currently, under the UP Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, among the university mandate of the Center is “to develop, organize, and manage research issues of national significance” (UP Executive Order 9 1985).

At present, UP CIDS is tasked by the University Strategic Plan for 2017 to 2023 to contribute to national development through (a) knowledge creation (enhancing research publications and creative work), and (b) public service (enhancing policy research and popularizing UP’s research findings) (UP 2017).

To attain this goal, since August 2017, the UP CIDS currently has twelve (12) Programs that belong to the following clusters:

- 1.) Education and Capacity-Building Cluster
 - a.) Education Research Program (ERP)
 - b.) Program on Higher Education and Policy Reform (HERPRP)
 - c.) Assessment, Curriculum, Technology and Research Program (ACTRP)
 - d.) Program on Data Science for Public Policy (DSPPP)

2.) Development Cluster

- a.) Program on Escaping the Middle-Income Trap: Chains for Change (EMIT C4C)
- b.) Political Economy Program (PEP)
- c.) Program on Alternative Development (AltDev)
- d.) Program on Health Systems Development (PHSD)

3.) Social, Political and Cultural Studies Cluster

- a.) Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC)
- b.) Islamic Studies Program (ISP)
- c.) Strategic Studies Program (SSP)
- d.) Decolonial Studies Program (DSP)

In light of the current political, economic, and sociocultural crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the UP CIDS Programs, from April 2020 onward, revised their Program activities to examine the pandemic's negative impact and propose possible solutions. The *Philippine Public Policy in a Time of Pandemic: Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge* webinar series aims to share the findings of the research work that UP CIDS Programs have been doing with regard to the current pandemic to the public. It also seeks to solicit feedback from concerned stakeholders, government officials and agencies, affected communities, and the general public, which will all feed into public policy.

To attain this objective, the UP CIDS COVID-19 webinar series is divided into four parts, which are the following:

1.) Governance Cluster (SSP, DSPPP, PSPC)

- Strategic Studies Program
- Program on Data Science for Public Policy
- Program on Social and Political Change

2.) Education Cluster (ACTRP, HERPR, ERP)

- Assessment, Curriculum, and Technology Research Center
- Education Research Program
- Program on Higher Education Research and Policy Reform

3.) Health Cluster (DSP, PHSD)

- Decolonial Studies Program
- Program on Health Systems Development
- Co-sponsor: Center for Women and Gender Studies

4.) Development Cluster (AltDev, PEP, EMIT C4C)

- Program on Alternative Development
- Political Economy Program
- Escaping the Middle-Income Trap Chains for Change



SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Southeast Asian Peoples' Alternatives in Pandemic Times

Eduardo C. Tadem, Ph.D.

Convenor

Program on Alternative Development, UP CIDS

Dr. Tadem began his presentation on the summary and policy recommendations on “Southeast Asian Peoples’ Alternatives in Pandemic Times” by saying that in general, Southeast Asian government responses to the ongoing pandemic have been uneven, often haphazard, and erratic. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has not engaged in coordinated and collaborative efforts to confront the health crisis. Amid these, the UP CIDS Alternative Development Program (AltDev) looked into and focused on COVID-19’s effects on grassroots communities and marginalized sectors by documenting for 10 months what marginalized communities in selected Southeast Asian societies are engaging in and how they are responding to the pandemic. The results are varied—conditioned by the location and levels of organizing, social solidarity, and collective consciousness of the community.

Further findings revealed that there is no concrete, unified, and coordinated regional response from Southeast Asian governments. This uncoordinated response contradicts the projected image of the

ASEAN as a unified and people-caring regional organization. As what the ASEAN Peoples' Forum in October 2020 pointed out, "ASEAN official responses have been largely token and uncoordinated. Country-based stimulus programs have been inadequate and inefficient. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic is 'weakening an already fragile regional cohesion in the face of growing domestic and geopolitical tensions,' prompting 'each ASEAN member state to go its own way' and curtailing regional diplomacy."

Looking at the statistics of new pandemic-caused infections and deaths in Southeast Asia from January 24 to March 4, 2021, Indonesia, Philippines, and Malaysia had 98.89 percent of new infections, whereas the rest of Southeast Asia countries had less than 2 percent. For new deaths, Indonesia had 87.88 percent, whereas the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand had 12 percent. The rest had zero deaths.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also posed challenges on the state of human rights in Southeast Asia. A Heritage Foundation report notes that 1) the lives of citizens are put at "greater-than necessary risk" because of "reduced preparedness" and "poor leadership and governance"; 2) the COVID-19 pandemic has been weaponized and used as "an opportunity to crack down on dissenters and restrict fundamental freedoms" and deepen authoritarian rule; and 3) the health crisis has been used "as an excuse to amass power." These all have also affected Southeast Asiann economies. Eight of the 12 economies had negative growth, of which the Philippines was the worst performer with a negative growth rate of 10 percent—the lowest in 73 years. The second worst was Thailand, with -6.4 percent, followed by Timor Leste with -6.35 percent. The only economies that grew were Vietnam, Brunei, Myanmar, and Laos, but at substantially much lower rates than 2019. Meanwhile, almost 300 million informal workers have had their livelihoods destroyed, resulting in more families pushed into poverty. There is also an increase in hunger. Further, overseas workers' remittance was expected to decline by 13 percent (USD 10 billion).

It can be gleaned that there is a race to procure vaccines for each country. However, the current rush to procure vaccines against the COVID-19 pandemic has again seen ASEAN member states exerting individual efforts with virtually no regional coordination or joint cooperation. It is basically every government for itself. In Southeast Asia, only eight countries have started vaccinations but at a very slow pace. Moreover, the lack of testing and the inability of the poor to access vaccines pose major challenges.

It was revealed in the study that urban communities are more negatively affected compared to rural areas. Reports from the 50 grassroots and marginalized communities who are part of this study state that despite organized communities' ability to mitigate the health crisis' effects through collectively owned and managed lands using sustainable development and agro-ecological methods, lockdowns and strict quarantine measures still hamper the communities' resilience and ability to meet basic needs. Government amelioration responses have also been inadequately, unevenly, and unequally distributed, as patronage politics further contributes to this matter. Unequal access to information and communication technologies is also very rampant, especially at the onset of online classes. There is also an observable rise in domestic violence against women and discrimination at work. However, it was noted that assistance from civil society organizations and other groups have extended their support to the communities' needs amid the pandemic, and that the indigenous peoples' use of traditional sources of food, nutrition, and health care have been practiced to augment the communities' needs.

With this, AltDev recommends the following:

- ▶ Southeast Asian governments must establish collective and cooperative efforts to address health, social, and economic problems;
- ▶ Governments must adopt a “whole of society” approach rather than a “whole of government” approach;

- ▶ The flawed model of “economic growth above all” needs to be overturned and shifted to one that emphasizes social protection and care for the environment;
- ▶ Health care systems must be reformatted toward preventive primary health care not driven by profit;
- ▶ Social inequality must be addressed through wealth tax, universal basic income, and asset reforms (land redistribution), among others;
- ▶ There must be more support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs);
- ▶ Labor rights must be upheld to organize and strike for better working conditions and workers’ participation in decision making;
- ▶ There must be increased support and subsidies for small farming households to address hunger issues; and
- ▶ Legal mechanisms must be instituted to acknowledge the right of civil society organizations, social movements, and peoples’ organizations to exist as separate and autonomous pillars of society.



PANEL I

Social Enterprise at the Time of Pandemic: The Case of *Igting* (Maigting na Samahan ng mga Panlipunang Negosyante ng Towerville Inc.)

Rowena Osal

Production Committee Head, Igting

Ms. Rowena Osal is a pioneer member of the women-led social enterprise called *Igting* and a community leader and organizer in Towerville, a community situated in the city of San Jose del Monte, Bulacan. She shared *Igting's* story of resilience, especially in the time of pandemic. Composed of mothers bound by a mission to help meet their family's needs after being relocated in Towerville, *Igting* was formed by a non-government organization (NGO) called the Center for Asian Mission for the Poor, Inc. (CAMP Asia). The center provided these mothers a livelihood through sewing. From 2010 to 2013, CAMP Asia guided *Igting* in running its social enterprise, and by 2014, the center declared *Igting* as an independent entity. Additionally, *Igting* has also been recognized by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the local government unit (LGU) as a social enterprise providing quality custom sewing services. However, its journey has not been easy. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these mothers ran their thriving social enterprise without any thought that a pandemic or any grave circumstance would later greatly impact their livelihood.

When the pandemic started affecting the country and the government imposed lockdowns nationwide in the middle of March 2020, the mothers of *Igting* were compelled to stay home for a month, resulting in a temporary closure of their social enterprise—hence, affecting their means of supporting their family. Even with the cash aid they received from the government, Ms. Osal reiterated that a livelihood is still necessary for them to survive, especially during a pandemic. For her, the government’s social amelioration package remained insufficient.

Igting’s mothers took a bold leap to manage back their livelihood when quarantine measures were loosened up in their area. This time, they considered their previous learnings and experiences amid the pandemic. In consultation with CAMP Asia, *Igting* started sewing fabric face masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) to supplement the shortage and high cost of these supplies, especially during the onset of the crisis. Through their Korean partners who placed bulk orders of fabric face masks, *Igting* mothers were able to return to production.

At work, they followed government health protocols, as they were aware that they were gathering in a public place. To avoid overcrowding in the workplace, they allowed other sewers to work from home. While inside their production center, they observed social distancing and wearing of face masks. Returning to production work was somehow good news for them. On the contrary, although they have their livelihood back, they still had the fear of contracting the virus one day.

Being in one community, the *Igting* sewers felt that the pandemic drew them closer as an organization. For those in the production site, they organized regular Zumba morning exercise sessions (with proper social distancing). *Igting* mothers also shared the task of preparing herbal medicines sourced from known medicinal plants for their sick children (such as those having a bad cough). These are a few of their alternative means to keep themselves healthy and in solidarity during the pandemic. Today, Ms. Osal relayed that their previous clients are slowly coming back, giving them more hope

that they will be able to continue running *Igting*. However, all these positive outcomes, she said, will not come into fruition if they were not organized as a group, and if they did not have the courage to apply the lessons from their life experiences to make *Igting* resilient despite the threat of COVID-19.

Indigenous Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Ayta Mag-Indi Community, Porac, Pampanga

Benny Capuno

Ayta Mag-Indi Cultural Master

Ayta Mag-Indi Community in Porac, Pampanga

Mr. Benny Capuno of the Ayta Mag-Indi Community in Porac, Pampanga was not able to join the webinar. Instead, a video that was conceptualized, designed, and filmed by the members of the Ayta-Magindi community was played. These indigenous peoples are located in the central part of the Philippines. This video is a reenactment of their experience and initiatives, which were implemented in response to the challenges and policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other things, the video highlights the processes the indigenous communities took in studying, planning, and realizing the efforts in ensuring their community's safety. Each step and initiative was anchored in the principles of compassion, humanity, and solidarity.

The video can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/LawanUPAltDev/videos/lawan-features-pag-agapay-kolektibo-komunal-katutubo-porac-pampanga-philippines/759488538114531/>

OPEN FORUM

Question 1

May we know if our UP economists agree that the Philippines is the worst performer in addressing our economic crisis? Given this, what policy recommendations should be adopted?

Dr. Tadem: There's nothing to agree or disagree. These are the facts, the official figures released by governments in the region. Actually, the Philippine government issued a report last December that revealed a 9.5 percent contraction in the Philippine economy. But now, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have adjusted it and stated that it is more than 10 percent contraction of the economy. It is really the worst performance among the 12 Southeast Asian economies here. The second placer is even a bit far behind at -6.4 percent. (So that's a given, let's not agree or disagree with that.) As far as policy recommendations are concerned, I have outlined them. This really goes much deeper than just being able to get people back to work or the "business as usual" kind of return to normal. In my opinion, the economic structure before the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the reasons why the economy was not able to handle the health crisis' impact. A paradigm change is really needed. We have an economy that prioritizes economic growth, even though gross domestic product (GDP) growth is not a good indicator of the economy's health. We need to look at the environmental and social costs of such growth, but it will take a very long discussion to implement this. For now, the most immediate measures that will address the economic crisis is to get people back into their livelihoods and provide the assistance needed for them to withstand the crisis' impact. One of the sound measures that we have proposed is to address social inequality by imposing a wealth tax to raise funds by cancelling debts and suspending debt repayments, as well as all

forgone revenues of the government, such as tax holidays—not by decreasing taxes, which the government is trying to do, and not by decreasing corporate taxes, which is a counterproductive measure. If you want to raise funds, then you have to raise corporate taxes to impose a tax on wealth *per se*.

Question 2

Regarding the tax, I think the government's position is for foreign investments. We lack capital, which is why there is a move to amend the Constitution to remove the economic restrictions and lower the tax to attract foreign investments. What is the weakness of this move?

Dr. Tadem: The measure to attract foreign investments will not solve the problem because foreign investors will be coming here for their [own] profits. It is not to serve the Filipino people; it is to serve their own motives and more often than not, they are repatriated out of the country. The type of investments that come in are really not the productive ones to get the economy back on its feet. This is mostly the assembly, the financial sector, [which are] not much better than the first-level raw material processing. These types of investments will not really help the country in the long run, as they are very short-sighted. The moment they get their profits and find a country that offers better incentives, they will move to that country. We cannot rely on foreign investments; we can only rely on our own resources. We have the resources. We have the capital to build our own economies. Of course, we need some sort of foreign assistance, but the problem of the government has been foregoing a lot of revenues—a lot of income that should actually go for building the economy. I disagree, totally, with the bill that has been passed in the Congress, which has not yet been signed by Duterte.

Question 3

Can Thailand's response be considered a good practice of massive community participation?

Dr. Tadem: I've heard that Thailand, in the early stages of the pandemic, was initially positive. There was supposed to be a community participation that enabled Thailand to (somehow) lessen the impact of the crisis. On the contrary, Thailand is under a military government. I will not give too much credence to the story of widespread community participation because this goes against the essence of the nature and characteristic of a military government. The Prime Minister, Prayut, is a dictator. He has not been responsive to the movements for democracy in Thailand. He has been clinging to power by military means. Now, you have seen the impact of that. Thailand is the second-worst performer in Southeast Asia, as far as the economy goes. Although the impact of the pandemic [in Thailand] has not been as grave as in the Philippines and Malaysia, the fact remains that the various measures imposed by the government has resulted in a huge downtrend on the Thai economy. I think it's getting worse right now.

Question 4

I would like to hear your thoughts on the political implications of the economic crisis in Southeast Asia, especially the economic crisis that happened because of the pandemic. Reflecting back, we can see that there is really a political crisis after the Asian financial crisis. We see the fall of Suharto [and] the political crisis in Thailand and Malaysia. I would like to know why we haven't seen a political crisis after the economic recession because of the pandemic. Is it because the authoritarian regime has managed to adjust to the political consequences of the crisis? Or is the economic crisis totally different from what it was during the 1990s?

Dr. Tadem: This is a different kind of crisis because it was generated by a pandemic—a health crisis—whereas the downfall of Suharto was precipitated by an economic crisis and was also affected by the rise of democratic movement in Indonesia. This is an altogether different type of crisis that stems from a health issue of tremendous magnitude that has never been seen in recent times. Stretching the history, you will find [that] a pandemic of this proportion, probably going back to the Middle Ages or as recent as the late 19th century, would be pandemics of typhoid and cholera in many parts of the world. Therefore, people are still probably a bit confused on how to respond because their immediate concern is their own basic needs—how to meet their basic needs, rather than how to organize to transform the economic crisis into political opportunities that can be used to affect political changes in the government. The other factor is the fact that many Southeast Asian governments are authoritarian governments. As I've pointed out earlier, governments have been using the COVID-19 crisis to amass more power, weaponizing it to crackdown on dissent and other forms of opposition in the region. This is another factor that prevents or delays the transformation of the economic crisis into a full-blown political crisis. But of course, much more analysis and research are probably needed. This is a very good question that we should look into for broader understanding of this particular phenomenon of a health crisis—becoming an economic crisis, but not yet becoming a political crisis at this time.



PANEL 2

Stateless Peoples at the Time of Pandemic: The Case of Mae Tao Clinic

Dr. Cynthia Maung

Founder and Director, Mae Tao Clinic

Burma has been under the military regime since 1962. During the 1988 student uprising and pro-democracy movement, thousands of students, civilians, and health workers fled to the border of Thailand and Burma (Myanmar). Dr. Maung, born and educated in Burma (Myanmar) not only as a medical doctor but also as a member of the movement, was one of them. At that time, she and others witnessed thousands of internally displaced peoples living in the war zone while there was malaria infestation. Many people were killed when the military violently attacked the border. She then initiated a medical center across the border in Thailand. Initially, it was a medical referral center where people wounded by landmines and war casualties and infected by malaria, as well as women who were delivered at home by untrained midwives can go. The medical center then referred the patients for emergency obstetric care to Thai hospitals. In 1989, Dr. Maung started Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), a medical primary health care service for those affected by the fighting on both sides of the border.

MTC has been growing for the past 33 years, providing comprehensive primary health care services, such as maternal and child care and health services for infectious and noncommunicable diseases. The center has expanded its program by training ethnic health workers; hence, they can provide primary health care services in their own community. In 1995, MTC also established an education and child protection program, considering that many displaced migrants do not have legal documents, including their children born in Thailand. They all do not have access to registration during those times. Given this, MTC started to advocate and work with Thai lawyers' societies and human rights groups. From 2008, the Thai government approved the issue of the official birth certificates of Thailand-born children of stateless peoples. However, this did not really solve the problem of statelessness because even though these children were born and registered in Thailand, their parents do not have either Thai or Myanmar citizenship. Hence, although they have birth certificates and identities, they still are stateless in either Thailand or Myanmar.

MTC's primary health care program annually provides for 100,000 patients. However, in 2020, MTC was only able to admit an estimated 4,000 patients, including 1,500 deliveries. The center also gives education and child protection services for almost 2,000 children in Thailand's side and works with local communities to improve access to education, particularly through providing shelter and food for children in the area. At present, almost 400,000 people have access to or benefit from MTC's services, such as healthcare, education protection, and access to legal issues.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 virus was first seen in Thailand, the Thai government imposed a strict controlled measure for the movement of migrant people, especially those working in the informal sector. As an effect, they lost their jobs because of a Thai law that restricted the formal and informal sector economy. These workers cannot travel freely as they do not have legal documents. Almost 50 percent of MTC's patients are coming from the cross-border population. Among its 100,000 consultations, 50 percent are migrant workers living in Thailand, whereas 50 percent are

crossing the border from Myanmar into Thailand for antenatal care, family planning, or other services. Since the lockdowns and border restrictions imposed by both the Thailand and Myanmar government, MTC patients living in Myanmar's side no longer had access to its health services. Therefore, the beneficiary number dramatically reduced to 30 percent from 2019 to 2020. Among those affected were children and women requiring ongoing medical care, such as vaccination and antenatal care. Pregnant women were observed to have less number of antenatal visits because of the pandemic. As a result, the low birthweight of infants increased to 12 percent in 2020 from 8 percent in 2019. This is one of the problems when women's access to antenatal care is reduced.

Many people who lost their jobs also faced irregular food supply. To address this, MTC tapped the network of community organizations—among them include teachers, health workers, and social workers. They mobilized resources to organize the emergency drive food program for approximately a population of 1,000 around Mae Sot area and in the border area.

Another challenge brought by the pandemic was the shutdown of the migrant learning centers intended for 6,000 children. Around 300 teachers mobilized their resources during the home-based learning program and the online study program for children. They believe that access to education and protection of the marginalized population are extremely crucial, especially amid the COVID-19 crisis. Although both health workers and teachers have mobility restrictions, they were able to access and provide essential services through the network. MTC's goal is to maintain the basic essential services such as health, education, and protection for all marginalized populations in the area. At the same time, its task is to assess their available facilities and capacities to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.

In April 2020, MTC started training its almost 300 health workers stationed at the health center. They were trained regularly in infection, prevention, and public health messaging. The center also worked with the nonhealth sector to look after the workplace, whether the facility is the school or the health center. Occupational

health and safety are one of MTC's major concerns. Given their very limited resources, MTC was still able to overcome the challenges of the pandemic.

It has also established a health screening center and isolation space for suspected cases. This is aside from collaborating with a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) that can perform the COVID-19 tests. With this, MTC now does regular screening, surveillance, and testing. Luckily, none among its health center staff tested positive for COVID-19. Meanwhile, a lot of restrictions are still ongoing in Mae Sot and in the border area because almost 300 have tested positive in the area.

During this COVID-19 crisis, more than 100,000 migrant workers, who crossed the border through Mae Sot, returned to their original villages since they lost their jobs. With this, MTC trained community health workers in Burma (Myanmar)'s side to prepare for the quarantine and screening center and implement the efficient control and prevention measures to protect these returning migrants' families and communities. International NGOs and governments were unable to access these conflict-affected areas because of the fighting until 2015, which made the area highly restricted and with very poor infrastructure. These community health workers are actively engaged throughout all sectors to coordinate numerous efforts, such as health education and protection.

Sadly, on February 1st, the military coup in Burma (Myanmar) took all the important works undertaken by the communities. The Burmese army escalated the military violence both in the cities, (i.e., Yangon and Mandalay) and in the border area. Currently, leaders such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the elected president, and many other politicians are detained by the military regime. All COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and reporting system have been stopped since very few cases are reported now. This is in contrast to before, in which all states and regions regularly report. Health workers from the Burma (Myanmar) side worked very hard to protect families and the nation. At present, teachers, civil society groups, and especially the youth, have actively joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

Burma (Myanmar) is now in a crisis—both because of the COVID-19 public health emergency and the complexity of the militarization in the country. Military forces and attacks have now expanded in the ethnic areas, and the media is repressed and practitioners are being arrested. With these, the public health crisis is intensified by the political and economic crisis. People have lost their jobs and feel very insecure. Hence, this [webinar] has become an opportunity to address or give updates about the situation not only in Burma (Myanmar) but also in the border area.

The Case of Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia

Anway "Sastro" Ma'ruf

Secretary General

Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI)

In Indonesia, the COVID-19 pandemic has become the biggest event in this century, as the health crisis led to the global economic crisis of capitalism. However, even before the pandemic, Indonesia's working people already had difficulty making both ends meet. The chaotic policies of the Indonesian government resulted in its slow response during the first wave of the pandemic, which ushered the continued transmission and spread of the COVID-19 virus. The situation showed the state's very weak management of the crisis. Further, it also showed how oligarchs capitalized the COVID-19 pandemic by using and even expanding their businesses for their own interest. The government formulated regulations to handle COVID-19 and respond to the economic crisis. One of these is the continuing process of the Omnibus Law, which will stop the people from holding protests or criticizing the government.

Another problem seen was the outdated statistical data of beneficiaries. There has been no updating of the data. As a result, many who were not the target beneficiaries have been recipients of multiple social assistance programs. These social assistance programs have become politicized and a source of corruption. Projections for new vulnerable groups and the pandemic's impact to them were also not taken into account.

The government exercised transactional-based handling. The distributed pre-employment cards for the online training were ridden with corruption and nepotism. The Ministry of Social Affairs was slow in the social assistance distribution and even included areas not among the target. The Ministry of Education and Culture, although having trouble with quotas and pulses because of the transition from offline to online learning, could have maximized the use of the state-owned channel PT Telkom. However, for free online

education, the state-owned channel did not cooperate with this, as well as other television channels. The Ministry of Health also delayed its process for public expenditure, even though many in the garment industry have already shifted to the production of PPEs, such as face masks.

Although these problems continue to unfold, there were many initiatives from the people's movement. People responded by reviving the culture of solidarity, also known as *Gotong Royong* (mutual cooperation). KPRI, as a people's movement, were able to produce health protective equipment, natural hand sanitizers made from betel leaf and lime, disinfectants, soaps, face masks, and handwashing facilities, since there was difficulty accessing these items. KPRI members also built a public kitchen, conducted fundraising, and collected and distributed basic necessities from the nearby community for people in need. In addition, because many Indonesian children cannot return to school or even join the online classes, the youth and students from universities collectively built a community library and reading garden for them. A planting movement was also organized by applying the concept of urban farming, family farming, and community farming. This is an innovation for building economic independence for families and communities.

Previously, KPRI has already been engaged in the debate and discussion on implementing a people's economic solidarity together with other networks. One of the discourses was about transforming charity into a social economic movement, which is the future of solidarity. This concerns the relationship and networking between the rural/coastal and the city, the farmers/fisherfolks and the workers, and the producers and the consumers. The other debate was about the distribution aspect, particularly the function of (Indonesian) centers or national organizations, such as Konsorium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA or Consortium for Agrarian Reform), AMAN, Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI or The Indonesian Forum for Environment), Kongres Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia (KASBI or Congress of Indonesia Unions Alliance), Kompetisi Sains Nasional (KSN or National Science Competition), Konsorium Pendidikan Biologi Indonesia (KPBI), and Konfederasi

Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI), among others. Beyond this debate, however, they are now working together to motivate people to help one another, which can be the new and post-COVID-19 foundation to achieve solidarity based on people-to-people cooperation. The other discussion was about raising awareness and improving the management of cooperation and the economic community institution, considering the lessons learned in the previous experience in building this economic solidarity movement.

The current debate is about social protection in relation to universal basic income (UBI), which is also known in Indonesia as Jamesta (Jaminan Pendapatan Dasar Semesta). KPRI is part of a network that is pushing for the implementation of UBI in Indonesia, which should benefit many people in the face of the COVID-19 crisis and the “new normal.” These organizations, behind the Jamesta campaign, have started the debate and discussion on the UBI, along with making strategies and building coalitions. They have also established teams for the public campaign using their own language (Bahasa). Additionally, they have also written working and policy papers and created jingles, posters, and short videos. The regular discussions have also explored organizing the Peoples’ Assembly, the Jamesta congress, and online actions.

Mr. Ma’ruf discussed the conceptual framework behind the push for UBI/JAMESTA. He shared his team’s 10-point Jamesta Manifesto (see below).

- 1.) The real form of the state is present in Jamesta.
- 2.) Jamesta is a form of recognition and fulfillment of basic rights and constitutional rights of every citizen (including persons with disabilities, the indigenous and marginalized peoples).
- 3.) It prevents corruption (within state institutions, NGOs, among others). This will address the corruption problem in the provision of social assistance in Indonesia.
- 4.) It guarantees income for all and social cohesion.

- 5.) It provides independence and equality to develop oneself.
- 6.) The cost of preventing poverty through Jamesta is lower than the cost of resolving the impact of poverty to oneself. This is a new paradigm of development.
- 7.) It provides basic capital and equal opportunity for every citizen.
- 8.) It increases the protection of citizens, such as the workers and women from exploitative social and economic relations.
- 9.) It allows citizens to maintain the control and ownership of other assets, such as land as a form of redistribution of state assets. This is like agrarian reform.
- 10.) It quickly and appropriately responds to the impact of the crisis and disasters considering that Indonesia is located within the Ring of Fire.

For more information about Jamesta, visit www.jamesta.org.

OPEN FORUM

Question 1

Given the largely uneven effect of the pandemic on ASEAN countries, can solidarity be expected from countries who are badly affected, so that they can provide substantial assistance to those who have been severely affected? Do you know of any regional initiatives that have been implemented so far?

Dr. Tadem: The only official regional body existing today is ASEAN. If there's any demand for any cooperative coordinated action, it has to be ASEAN that should do it, but ASEAN is not doing it. We do not expect ASEAN to really do it because if you go through its history since the 1960s, there has never really been any substantive collaborative effort to address a single issue or concern—whether it is a pandemic, war, conflict between countries, or human rights violations being imposed by one government over its people. ASEAN always turns a blind-eye to this. I think there was only one occasion where there was some kind of collaborative effort. This was the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in the 1970s, but this was more at the prodding of the United States government rather than an initiative within ASEAN itself. This is one of the basic infirmities of the ASEAN type of regional integration because it sweeps issues and concerns affecting Southeast Asian peoples under the rug, leaving it up to each country to address these questions. As far as the COVID-19 pandemic issue is concerned, there have been meetings, but these would have been nonproductive meetings among them. There was an effort to raise funds to address the COVID-19 crisis, but it turned out that these funds were actually loans accessed from donor agencies and donor governments. However, it has not come into effect yet. You really have an organization here that is helpless and impotent in addressing a health crisis not only regional in scope but also global. This is really quite sad, but it is also infuriating.

Dr. Maung: When we talk about regional collaboration, our experience on the border, during the past 10 years, has seen the migrant workers' access to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) from the Thai government through the Global Fund. In 2017, when the Global Fund was finished on Thailand's side, we referred all our HIV patients who needed access to ARVs to the local government hospital in the Myanmar side just across the border. There are almost 1,000 patients on both sides of the border who access ARVs through the Myanmar national program. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, this program has been held, so there are around 250 HIV patients accessing ARVs through the community networks. We have been advocating for the Thailand and Myanmar governments to make an official agreement for the continued access of patients to ARVs. However, this is not happening yet. The cross-border collaboration is organized by the local people because the national level takes longer. But with COVID-19 restrictions, alongside the Burmese military's takeover, this local collaboration had to stop. We have been concerned because both governments restrict our border movements. Hence, opportunities for these people—for both healthcare and economics—are affected. We are also very concerned with a huge number of people now fleeing to the border, who would be needing protection, particularly the politicians and those who escaped the military violence. Further, we are concerned with the escalating human rights violations in the whole country happening not only in the city but also in the border or ethnic region.

We need support and solidarity from ASEAN countries and civil society groups to monitor the ongoing human rights violations, the political oppression, and the Burmese (junta) leading toward more militarization. The effort for democratic transition made over the past 10 years has been stopped. It is very sad for all generations, including our generation where too many were killed in 1988 and the military seized power and closed the universities for more than five years. Now, more than 2,000 have been arrested, which also happens every night where they snatch and violently arrest all these activists. They released more than 20,000 prisoners but still arrested more people actively participating in the civil movement.

Mr. Ma'ruf: For the ASEAN people, we need democracy in the region, citing the problems in Myanmar, Thailand, and Indonesia. We are not only in a crisis brought by the pandemic, but we are in a democratic crisis in the region. We need to strengthen solidarity not only to address the political problem but also solidarity for economic democracy. On our proposal about the UBI or Jamesta, it is very important to meet the basic needs amid the condition of the people because of the pandemic. What we need to do is work together and bring real alternative solutions in ASEAN and strengthen solidarity in economic, political, social, and cultural aspects.



SYNTHESIS AND CLOSING REMARKS

Jose Monfred Sy

Project Leader

Program on Alternative Development

Mr. Jose Monfred Sy synthesized and closed the webinar by thanking the speakers who shared their insights that development can actually come from the initiatives and mobilizing efforts of the people and the communities. He reiterated that the people cannot solely rely on the government which, as Dr. Tadem discussed, is weaponizing the pandemic to amass more power and inflict authoritarian rule, pushing marginalized communities into further despair.

Despite all the inconsistencies and unpreparedness of the ASEAN governments, organized communities continue to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, answer the needs of the people, and pave unique ways to development.

We started with the social enterprise of *Igting*. Weng was able to show us how the pandemic hit hard the livelihoods of the mothers and women of their organization. Although she cannot have their lives depend on the Philippine national government, the organization was able to use their own abilities to help others and also sustain its members through this social enterprise. The next case that was featured in the video was the Ayta-Magindi community. The video

showed how they handled the pandemic firsthand. We witnessed how they discussed it in their community to evacuate to their ancestral domain to mitigate the effects of the health crisis. Here, we see a response that is collective, communal, and definitely indigenous, using their own knowledge and resources. Across the Southeast Asia region, we had the case of the Mae Tao Clinic brought to us by Dr. Cynthia. Mae Tao Clinic will serve as an inspiration that despite the limited resources and the difficulties in being at the borders and at the fringes of two countries, it was able to build capacity and produce healthcare workers. Further, it was able to assign them to different communities, definitely helping in filling the gaps of poor government response. Finally, we were able to hear the experiences of KPRI through Sastro. The conversations centered on UBI and ways of improving livelihoods not only through social enterprises but also through continuous campaigns, education of different communities and organizations, and collective assertion for a better economic development for everyone.

All these efforts must inspire the public to further call for Southeast Asian governments to establish collaborative and cooperative efforts to address the health, social, and economic problems that Southeast Asian region faces right now. These cases also push the public to rethink the current ASEAN model: economic growth above all.

However, growth and development must uphold people's needs and interests. These people are not only subjects or beneficiaries to development. Organized or not, the people have the capacity to mobilize themselves for development based on their needs and interests despite the lack of proper government response—a new paradigm that sees the people's capacity and development based on their essential needs. However, it must be noted that the “whole of society” approach cannot relieve the government of its duty to the people. Rather, it emphasizes what ordinary people and communities can do for the country and for Southeast Asia. These alternatives are possible, and so the fight continues.



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COVID-19 AND THE ECONOMY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

DEVELOPMENT CLUSTER, PART II



Asst. Prof. Benjamin Velasco of the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR), co-convenor of the Program on Alternative Development (AltDev) moderated the second in a series of webinars on the economic impact of COVID-19.

Dr. Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, UP CIDS Executive Director, provided the Opening Remarks. She gave an overview of the objective and the Programs of UP CIDS, particularly the Center's role in contributing to national development through the conduct of research and knowledge-sharing on the crucial developmental issues in the country. Dr. Encarnacion Tadem also provided insight into the webinar series being conducted.



PRESENTATIONS

COVID-19 Pandemic and Inclusive Growth¹

Dr. Annette Balaoing-Pelkmans

Convenor of the UP CIDS Program on Escaping the Middle-Income Trap Chains-for-Change (EMIT C4C)

Senior Research Analyst, Partnerships Resource Centre, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University

Dr. Annette Balaoing-Pelkmans began the presentation by explaining the pandemic crisis in the Philippines in the context of past global crises. She briefly discussed how the global economy is crisis-prone, wherein market failures are the norm more than the exception. The first among these global crises is the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (AFC), which occurred from a period of high growth in Asia. It was deemed as a watershed moment since most of the countries affected were those considered as “poster countries” of how globalization will benefit the world. The AFC started in Thailand, Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines. From the most recent crisis,

¹ This presentation is culled mostly from the policy brief that the presenter authored with Dr. Adrian Mendoza: Annette Balaoing-Pelkmans and Adrian Mendoza, “Diversification, Jobs and the COVID-19 Recovery: Exploring Opportunities for Economic Diversification and Productive Employment in the Philippines,” United Nations Philippines Policy Brief Series, August 2021, <https://philippines.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Diversification%2C%20Jobs%20and%20the%20COVID-19%20Recovery.pdf>

which is the global financial crisis, what could be observed is that the deeper the recession, the longer its impact on the economy.

Impacts of Economic Crisis

Reversal of Gains

Dr. Balaoing-Pelkmans discussed the impacts of the deep economic crisis. Foremost is the reversal of gains. Based on past trends, it has been observed that there is difficulty making up for lost ground when the country's economy deviates from its potential trend. When the Asian Financial Crisis happened, it took ten years before the Philippine economy got back in its same growth path. This means that had the crisis not occurred, the GDP of the Philippines would have been 20 percent greater than it was in 2019.

Unemployment

Second among the impacts is unemployment, particularly among youth workers. The reason behind this is that the turnover costs for youth workers are lower due to low experience and low seniority. Unskilled workers are also affected, since skilled workers have an option to downgrade to a job that is lower than their potential. During an economic crisis, one of the first sectors that is affected is the construction industry. This is the reason why it has been observed that more men are affected than women when the pandemic started. This is relative, however, since it largely depends on the leading sector of the country. In Cambodia, 39% of exports are in the garment sector. Hence, in this case, the more observable impact is on women.

Consumer Confidence

Consumer confidence is also affected during an economic crisis. In developing countries, companies tend to deplete their stocks. Therefore, sectors that produce raw materials and inputs to production are the first to be affected.

Debt Legacy

An obvious impact is an increase in risk aversion by banks during and after a crisis, which is the reason behind a large financing gap.

Weaker Multiplier Effects

Another impact of the crisis are weak multiplier effects. When a fiscal stimulus is implemented, it tends to have a weakened effect. If it will not be used quickly, people are more inclined to save the money in order to have a buffer, expecting that they will pay higher taxes in the future. Dr. Balaoing-Pelkmans further explained that if the economy of a country is import-dependent, the consumer spending that is triggered by the stimulus is leaked away through increased imports.

Political Unrest

As exemplified by what happened in Indonesia during the Asian Financial Crisis, an economic crisis mixed with existing political unrest proved to be a toxic combination. People with no jobs or prospects have nothing to lose. This situation is conducive for political unrest.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines

To provide context, Dr. Balaoing-Pelkmans discussed that when the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Philippine economy was already losing its steam. It was marked with the lowest growth for some years reeling from the financial crisis in the early 1990s, the Asian Financial Crisis, and the global financial crisis in 2007. A surge in growth occurred, but it was not enough to cover what has been lost. In 2019, the production (exports) grew only by 2%. This was brought about by weak global demand due to the trade wars among the United States, China, and the European Union. With this, the Philippines entered the pandemic in a considerably weak position.

In terms of gross domestic product (GDP), the Philippines grew by 2.9% in 2019 with a reduction of almost 10% at the end of 2020.

This is the lowest annual growth that has been recorded in the Philippines since 1949. Comparing the situation during the Asian financial crisis, the country at that period experienced a dip of 12.5%; however, that only lasted for a brief moment. The Philippines has never experienced a recession as the one it is experiencing at present.

Dr. Pelkmans-Balaoing clarified that economies are mostly measured by their gross national product (GNP) and gross national income (GNI). In particular, the GNI is more important since it reflects what Filipinos earn, including remittances from abroad. In terms of GNI, the drop is observably larger with 11.1% and 12% for 2019–2020 and 2020 (fourth quarter), respectively. This will have a huge impact in terms of the medium-term growth in the Philippines.

In terms of economic sectors, what suffered the most is industry, specifically the manufacturing sector and the services sector. Employment in what are considered as high contact professions—the accommodation and the food sectors—was largely affected.

Based on 2020 data, construction, mining, and quarrying were likewise deeply affected by the pandemic. Some sectors showed growth in certain periods in terms of employment. These are the financial and insurance activities, information and communication, agriculture, and utilities. In terms of share in Global Value Added (GVA), the agricultural sector is still the most important sector in the economy. In the export sector, the more labor intensive industries, such as transport equipment and electronics, also took a hit.

On the distribution of workers, most of the workers (60%) are in the Low Basic Pay categories (Construction, Mining, Accommodation, Food, Retail, Trade, Fishing, Agriculture/Forestry). In terms of distribution of workers by class of work, most workers are in the elementary occupations. It is not surprising to see that most workers only have a secondary education. Labor force participation rate has fallen to 59.5% in 2020 as compared to 61.3% in 2019. In addition, the unemployment rate is higher than the normal trend.

On the share of full-time workers and average working hours, there was a drop from 69% (2019) to 23% (Q1, 2020). In terms of

working hours per week, the average working hours in February 2020 was 38 to 39 hours.

Examining the labor impact of COVID-19 until the third quarter of 2020, Dr. Balaoing-Pelkmans assessed that around 15 million workers have been affected through unemployment and underemployment.

Concerning the impact of COVID-19 on the different pay classes, medium wage earners suffered more because of the pandemic's impact on manufacturing and construction.

Inclusive Growth: Challenges

There has already been some gains and resurgence in the economy coming from the recession of 2009. The initial target for poverty incidence was 14% in 2020. Based on the NEDA projection, it is now 16% from 17.5%. However, due to the possibility of new waves of infection and the efficacy of the vaccinations, there are uncertainties on the whole global economy. Widespread vaccination of populations also leads to the opening up of the economy which could increase the possibility of a new wave of infections.

In terms of GNP, the Philippines was almost on track to become an upper-middle class country by 2022. The Philippines was one of the first countries in Asia that became a middle-income country. If the country will grow, for instance, by 6%, it will reach the upper-middle income classification. However, with the impact of the pandemic and with a GNI per capita of \$3,376 (2020), the country needs almost 20% growth to be classified as upper-middle class.

Dr. Balaoing-Pelkmans likened the risk of scarring to getting COVID, where the chance of getting other respiratory diseases in the future becomes higher. The risk of scarring means that there is going to be a permanent impact on the strength and resilience of the economy. Scarring is also crucial for youth unemployment. As observed in Japan during the 1990s, when the economy finally recovered after the financial crisis, companies tended to prefer fresh graduates. If individuals who graduated last year and this year will

not be employed, their chance of not entering the labor market at their skill level is higher.

Another challenge for a developing country like the Philippines is the loss of entrepreneurial capital, especially of middle firms. The focus should be at the firms that have transitioned from small to a middle-sized company. This shows that transition is possible. If that transition is viable, then there is a trajectory towards growth.

In a crisis, all the bankruptcies and business closures could lead to a loss of entrepreneurial capital. It is typical for smaller firms to exit first while the ones that remain are the bigger firms. The concentration of the market structure now becomes much more oligopolistic or even monopolistic.

Lastly, one of the biggest challenges observed is the digital divide, especially in agriculture. Those who can utilize digital highways can benefit from the digital revolution, but for many who do not have any digital skills/resources or even bank accounts, that is a huge risk.

Policy Reforms in Social Protection and Labor Market Systems Beyond COVID-19

Dr. Emily Christi A. Cabegin

UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations

Dr. Emily Christi A. Cabegin started her presentation by defining the term “formally employed”: “(a) wage employment which is covered by a written contract and where both the worker and the worker’s employer pays for the worker’s social security contribution; (b) self-employment that is registered by the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), and have some bookkeeping record system for tax payment.” This is the definition adopted by the Seventeenth Conference of Labor Statisticians of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Although the regular round of quarterly Labor Force Survey does not collect information on the dimensions of informal employment as defined by the absence of any of the above qualifications for formal employment, Dr. Cabegin estimated the magnitude and rate of informal employment from the data on the characteristics of workers with the highest rates of informality based on the 2008 Informal Sector Survey. In that Survey, the following types of workers have at least 90% rates of informal employment: (a) workers whose basis of payment are in-kind, *pakyaw*, per piece, among others; (b) workers whose nature of work are seasonal, short-term, or working for different employers; (c) workers in agriculture, fishery, forestry, and elementary occupations such as cleaners, laborers; and (d) workers who are self-employed, working in own-family farm or business, or in private households.

Dr. Cabegin estimated that more than four out of five workers in the country were informally employed in 2019 and 2020. This data has crucial impacts on the welfare of the workers since informal employment is characterized by low wages, a lack of collective representation, and is outside of the coverage of labor statutes for social protection.

The stringent lockdown and economic recession brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a massive reduction in both employment and work hours. In the first quarter of 2020, about 8.4 million workers were not employed compared to the first quarter of 2019. Of those who were employed, 12.5 million reported that they have a job but with no work, indicating that they were temporarily laid off. It must be noted that the policy of “no work, no pay” applies to most of these jobs. There is a reduction of full-time workers by almost 20 million in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the first quarter of 2019.

When lockdown measures were relaxed during the second quarter of 2020, there were about two million less people employed compared to the same period of 2019. Less than six million workers were working full-time during that period of 2020. Observably, there was a shift from those who were temporarily laid off from the first quarter towards part-time employment with more than three million workers in the second quarter of 2020. Nevertheless, a considerable number of workers lost full-time work.

Dr. Cabegin highlighted the importance of a more inclusive social protection in the labor market system. It is the policy of the state to empower every Filipino to meet their minimum basic needs of health, food, nutrition, water and environmental sanitation, income security, shelter and decent housing, peace and order, education and functional literacy (Rep. Act No. 8425 [1998], § 2[1]). This is likewise operationalized in the government’s goal of the Philippines being free from poverty and transitioning the country to a nearly high-income status by 2040 (NEDA 2017a).

Dr. Cabegin argued that the Philippines needs to increase the level of investment in public social protection, which is among the lowest levels in Southeast Asia accounting for 2.2% of GDP compared to 6.3% in Vietnam (ILO 2013). One way is through expanding statutory coverage of social insurance. Social insurance coverage in the Philippines is largely limited to regular employment. Based on the PSA (2019a, 2019b), only 41% of the labor force and about 60% of wage workers are contributing to a pension scheme. This

implies that 40% of the wage workers are not covered by a pension scheme upon retirement. Additionally, only 11% of self-employed individuals are contributing to a pension scheme. The situation of domestic workers is worse with only 1% contributing to a pension scheme despite the Domestic Workers Act of 2013, which mandates the coverage of social insurance for domestic workers.

She explained that the lack of pension coverage for workers has long-term effects since the Philippines' demographic transition shows that the population is aging. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA 2019a) shows that only 20% of senior citizens are covered by a pension scheme.

Many informal workers fall between the cracks in that they are not rich enough to have the financial capacity to make regular payment contributions to a social insurance scheme, but also not poor enough to be eligible for social programs, such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

Dr. Cabegin asserted that there should be measures that would support these types of workers or population groups. She proposed to delink social security with employment status to achieve universal social protection. In the current system, self-employed individuals pay 100% contribution, compared to regular employees who pay 35% because of a cost-sharing burden with their employers who pay 65%. The current contribution scheme could be described as regressive since it makes the poorer workers pay more. Dr. Cabegin contrasted this scheme with the National Health Insurance Program that has achieved almost universal health care coverage with two types of members: directly paying members and the rest of the population whose premium contributions are either fully or partially subsidized from general taxation.

Other measures include government matching of social insurance contributions and the mandatory establishment of a social security fund for platform-mediated workers.

Regarding pensions for senior citizens, Dr. Cabegin highlighted that two out of three senior citizens have no pension (20% were

covered by a pension scheme and another 17% by the social pension program). The monthly cash assistance for indigent senior citizens is significantly low at PHP 800 every month, less than one-third of the international poverty line of USD 1.90/day per capita. Senate Bill 133 seeks to address this situation by proposing to increase the monthly pension to PHP 1,000 and including all senior citizens not covered by a pension scheme.

On the issue of unemployment, Dr. Cabegin supports the provision of an unemployment insurance as part of the social insurance scheme. House Bill 7028 proposes the provision of unemployment benefits of 80% of monthly salary for up to three (3) months. Another measure discussed by Dr. Cabegin was the expansion of coverage of social assistance programs to poor or nearly poor households. Dr. Cabegin asserts that the national per capita poverty threshold of PHP 71/day is too low and proposes to anchor the poverty threshold with the international per capita poverty line by income class. This is to better reflect the deprivation and impoverishment of Filipino households: at PHP 165/day (USD 3.20/day) for lower middle income countries, such as the Philippines, and PHP 265/day (USD 5.50/day) for upper middle income countries, which is the income status targeted to be achieved by the Philippines in 2022.

Additional proposals are the following: to consolidate and to harmonize the labor market programs of the government (e.g., Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Technical Education And Skills Development Authority (TESDA); establish entrepreneurship education as a component of the Sustainable Livelihood Program-Microenterprise Development; strengthen the establishment of Negosyo Centers across the country; provide the enabling regulatory framework for transitioning informal to decent work, such as the Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy; and to allow informal workers to organize and bargain collectively).

Dr. Cabegin concluded her presentation by highlighting the need for the government to prioritize policy reforms for stronger social protection and a labor market system that would foster a sustained inclusive economic growth.

Rebuilding MSMEs in Times of the Pandemic and Beyond

Prof. Rolando Ramon C. Diaz

UP Institute for Small-Scale Industries

Prof. Rolando Ramon C. Diaz began the presentation by discussing how the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread impacts on all aspects of human lives and society. With the continuing increase in the number of cases and the reimposition of the strictest lockdown category in National Capital Region Plus (NCR+), the Philippines could be considered as one of Asia's COVID-19 hotspots.

Among the various sectors of the economy, the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) were hit the hardest. Experts have remarked that the pandemic has wiped out major gains achieved by the MSME sector in the past decades. Acknowledging the vital contributions of the MSME sector, Prof. Diaz opined that MSMEs must be kept afloat, as they serve as the engine that would lead to economic recovery and growth.

Presenting the impact of COVID-19 on MSMEs, Prof. Diaz discussed the infections and deaths that gave rise to lockdowns and quarantines, uncertainty, fears, and anxiety. Some people, on the other hand, experienced pandemic fatigue. The lockdowns brought about loss of freedom and mobility, which led to the disruption/breakdown of the supply chain. On top of this, the smooth flow of raw materials was affected, which in turn seriously impacted the operations of MSMEs. The lack of available public transportation led to a lower level of MSME operation, and reduced the take-home pay of workers and household incomes.

The psychological effect of the pandemic had a dire effect on consumer and business confidence, or what is considered as demand shock. Decreased expenditure led to a decline in sales revenue (some experienced 50% to 100% decline, or zero sales). This, in turn, led to the erosion of the working capital, which caused insolvency and

numerous foreclosures. Because of unemployment and loss of income, 7.6 million households reported experiencing hunger and poverty. Economic recession was -9.5%, the biggest contraction since World War II. The irony is that the inflation reached a two-year high of 4.7% in February 2021. Since the government cannot collect taxes anymore, it registered a budget deficit of PHP 1.37 trillion. With less budget, the government was unable to support the most affected sectors.

Prof. Diaz underscored some factors that had profound impact on MSMEs, particularly lockdowns, uncertainties, anxieties, supply chain disruptions, raw material unavailability, lack of public transportation, workers unable to report for work, the level of MSME operation, the big drop in sales revenue accompanied by the burden of paying fixed costs, cash liquidity, inability to pay long-term obligations (payment of principal and interest of loans), working capital depletion, insolvency, closures, demand shocks, and consumer confidence, among others. He also identified the most affected sectors, such as hotels/accommodations, theaters, travel and tours, restaurants (particularly dine-in), public transport, and creative arts.

After explaining the profound impacts of the pandemic on MSMEs, Prof. Diaz moved to the proposed program of interventions. This is divided into three (3) phases:

Phase 1 - Immediate: Give vital lifeline to MSMEs in a span of six months to one year.

Phase 2 - Intermediate: Recalibrate and refocus the business compass with a target period of more than one year to three years.

Phase 3 - Strategic: Steer back the business in the normal course with a period of implementation of more than three to five years.

The interventions encompass economic/financial, health/wellness, operations, technology, organization structure/strategic planning, immediate/intermediate, and strategic.

It is important to strengthen the representation of MSMEs, particularly the MSMED Council, the highest policy-making body

for MSME development. The depressed demand should also be addressed. However, turning back to normalcy is not a simple process. In order to do so, the perils of the pandemic should be addressed first before the economy can be fully opened. Some business orientations require to be repurposed and recalibrated.

To provide a lifeline to struggling MSMEs, the government has to find a way to defer most of the obligations for fixed overhead costs. Similarly, there is a need to impose temporary relief by means of a higher tariff on locally-produced MSME products, and to revisit policies such as the Rice Tariffication Law and trade liberalization law.

On management of disruptions, the Institute for Small-Scale Industries (ISSI) has been pushing for business continuity planning that promotes the culture of preparedness and resilience. There is a need to manage the disruptions in inbound/outbound logistics/supply sources, to amplify online consultations and mentorships, and to formulate measures to cope with Barriers, Irritants, Disruptions, and Annoyances (BIDA).

Prof. Diaz emphasized that government assistance and support should respond to the actual needs of the sector. Developing an effective information campaign for these financial assistance is necessary. In the Bayanihan 2, out of the PHP 165.5 billion, only less than half was released by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

Based on key interviews and computations conducted by Prof. Diaz, the estimated amount needed to revive the economy is at least PHP 86 billion.

In summary, the following comprise the proposed package of interventions for MSMEs:

- Financial and Economic Assistance: Amplify loan packages, recast business, improve information dissemination

- Institutional Strengthening and Planning: Make MSMEs more represented in the policy-making body
- Health and Wellness: Control the infection, roll out an effective vaccine plan
- Operations: Strengthen the weaknesses in the operational structure of MSMEs (broaden supply base, coordination for checkpoints and border control)
- Technology: Use of Information Technology and Communications (ITC) and Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies to address BIDA

All these interventions have to be incorporated so that the MSME sector will be able to overcome the biggest challenge that they have encountered to date.

OPEN FORUM

The first question focused on recommendations on how the economy can recover from the pandemic. Dr. Balaoing-Pelkmans responded that the COVID-19 situation could be likened to an individual who underwent a major surgery. There is a need for a clear and expert-backed rehabilitation plan to recover. In terms of the economy, a systems approach is needed. The challenge, however, is that government agencies are fragmented and are operating in silos. There is a proliferation of programs and projects that are not integrated.

Previous crises have introduced numerous reforms that otherwise are difficult to initiate. Now that these weaknesses in the economy have been revealed, it is an opportunity to undertake reforms in the following areas:

- 1.) Information sharing and digitization: In order to have collaboration, a systems approach to sharing is needed. This will lead to a more efficient consolidation of information and data.
- 2.) Fiscal stimulus must trigger reforms and new behaviors: Increased formality, increased digitization, and introduction of new business models (i.e., reform contractual practices, among others).

Another question centered on the government's focus in providing financial assistance, when it is better to equip people with knowledge and education on how to start their own businesses. In response, Dr. Cabegin explained that the proposed Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy could address this situation. Once the Magna Carta is passed, informal workers will be given the protection and the benefits that they deserve. Aside from

unemployment, another challenge is underemployment. The end goal should not be just providing work, but sustainable decent work for all. The government should empower small and medium businesses so that they can provide better working conditions for their workers.

Dr. Cabegin proposed that the Sustainable Livelihood Program in the 4Ps should be transferred to the DTI. Providing capital is not enough, since entrepreneurship education is equally important. It is vital to link them to local and international markets. Additionally, there is a need to address the highly inequitable process of development and wide income disparities across regions in the country. Programs for regional industrialization, agricultural modernization, and entrepreneurship should be strongly implemented. Regional education policies and programs should go hand-in-hand with regional industrial policies and programs to meet the labor requirements for skilled manpower under a more modern and industrialized regional economy.

On how to address the lack of sources of income and employment, Prof. Diaz remarked that the economy must first be revived. Loans should be provided since numerous businesses have totally lost their capital. Informing and educating the public on the requirements and the process of availing such loans is necessary. Moreover, it is crucial to refocus and recast the business towards where the demand is.

Another vital factor is to renew people's confidence to purchase and buy. Once there is an increase in demand, business owners will be more driven to continue their businesses. With adequate support, MSMEs can be one of the drivers of growth of the economy. Prof. Diaz stated that it is equally important to teach young people to become youth entrepreneurs, in order to have a multiplier effect on the entire economy. He also highlighted the importance of having holistic government programs that are moving in one direction.

On the effect of the pandemic on the 2022 elections, Dr. Balaoing-Pelkmans explained different scenarios. Since there is a trend towards vaccination, people might be thankful to the government for reviving the economy. If the recovery of the economy will be difficult, there might be more disgruntled voters; hence, they will use their

votes to protest. Another cynical view is that the government will try to use the stimulus towards the following year. The temporary boom might then lead to a pent-up euphoria and optimism which will be good for the current administration.



SYNTHESIS

Ms. Jane Lynn Capacio

UP CIDS

Ms. Jane Lynn Capacio underscored the main points discussed by the speakers. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the worst economic fall-out in history. It surfaced the extreme vulnerability of poor population groups, informal laborers, and MSMEs. The Philippines has performed poorly in crisis recovery relative to its ASEAN neighbors. Based on some income path, the Philippines was almost on a better status prior to the pandemic, but looking at our performance during this crisis, it seems that the country is moving at a glacial pace relative to our neighbors. The pandemic also highlighted the lamentable disjointedness of the government's response to the crisis.

Nevertheless, there are still opportunities. The COVID-19 crisis has made people collectively think of proposals, such as the suggestion to delink social security with employment status and unemployment insurance. The possibility of partnerships beyond the usual public-private partnerships has also started to be considered. Various economic and financial recommendations were proposed during the webinar. UP CIDS will find a way to gather and turn these into policy and program advocacies, especially during consultations with key policy makers.

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MULTILEVEL CRISIS GOVERNANCE:
INTERNATIONAL AND PHILIPPINE
RESPONSES AND PROSPECTS IN THE
MIDST OF PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

GOVERNANCE CLUSTER



INTRODUCTION

The governance cluster of the University of the Philippines Center of Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS), composed of the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC), Program on Data Science for Public Policy (DSPPP), and the Strategic Studies Program (SSP), organized a webinar titled “Multilevel Crisis Governance: International and Philippine Responses and Prospects in the Midst of Pandemic Challenges” on April 29, 2021, in partnership with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).

As the third installment in the UP CIDS “Philippine Public Policy in a Time of Pandemic: Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge” webinar series, it examined the policy and research implications of the response of governance actors to COVID-19 and the impact and challenges posed by the pandemic on different levels of governance. Specifically, the following questions were asked: (1) What are the impacts and challenges of COVID-19 at different levels of governance? (2) How have different governance actors responded to COVID-19? and (3) What are the possible policy and research responses to the challenges of the pandemic, especially in the Philippines?



WELCOME REMARKS

Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, Ph.D.

Executive Director

Center for Integrative and Development Studies

University of the Philippines

and

Professor

Department of Political Science

College of Social Sciences and Philosophy

University of the Philippines Diliman

Professor Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, Ph.D. welcomed the participants to the webinar with an introduction to the UP CIDS. Founded in 1985, the UP CIDS is the policy research unit of the University of the Philippines System and has sought to encompass various perspectives, methodologies, and ideologies, and its conduct of basic policy-oriented research.

“Under the strategic trajectory of the University since 2017, UP CIDS aims to contribute to national development and knowledge creation through enhancing research, publications, and creative work,” Professor Encarnacion Tadem said. This includes hosting workshops, lecture forums, conferences, and webinars, as well as various publication outputs, such as policy briefs, discussion papers, monographs, conference proceedings, and the *Philippine Journal of Public Policy: Interdisciplinary Development Perspectives*.

According to Professor Encarnacion Tadem, the “Philippine Public Policy in a Time of Pandemic: Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge” webinar series is another component of the Center’s initiatives that specifically examines the negative impact of the pandemic and seeks to establish dialogue among various stakeholders which will feed into public policy. This webinar series is divided into four clusters composed of the 12 UP CIDS programs, namely (1) the **education cluster**, consisting of the Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Program, Education Research Program, and the Program on Higher Education Research and Policy Reform; (2) the **health cluster**, consisting of the Decolonial Studies Program, Islamic Studies Program, and the Program on Health Systems Development; (3) the **development cluster**, consisting of the Program on Alternative Development, Political Economy Program, and Escaping the Middle-Income Trap: Chains for Change; and (4) the **governance cluster**, composed of the Strategic Studies Program, Program on Data Science for Public Policy, and the Program on Social and Political Change. These clusters and programs are the organizers of this installment in the UP CIDS COVID-19 webinar series.

She concluded her remarks by emphasizing the need to produce “practical and informed policies to aid government officials, agencies, and other relevant major players” as the country and the region continue to confront various challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Monitoring COVID's Impact on Democracy: The Philippines and Beyond

Amanda Cats-Baril

*Regional Advisor, Constitution Building in Asia and the Pacific,
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)*
[as of the webinar]

Amanda Cats-Baril presented a global perspective on the impacts of COVID-19 on democracy. She based her presentation on the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) framework of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). The GsoD framework looks at the current global and regional democracy landscape to identify positive trends and challenges to democracy. It makes its assessment according to five core attributes, namely: (1) participatory engagement, (2) representative government, (3) fundamental rights, (4) checks on government, and (5) impartial administration.

Cats-Baril then presented the GsoD country profile of the Philippines (Figure 1). The Philippines was observed to have a very strong and deeply-rooted democracy but it also experienced a number of challenges. In Figure 1, the different colored areas indicate the performance of the Philippines according to the GsoD attributes. In comparison, there is no significant difference between the trends found in the Philippines versus the regional and global trends. In some areas such as local democracy and electoral participation, the Philippines can actually be seen performing better than other countries both in the region and globally. According to Cats-Baril, since the end of the Marcos era and the ratification of the 1987 Constitution, “in many areas, the Philippines is performing better than other countries both in the region and globally; this shows

that the Philippines has been on a steady path towards a strong democracy.”

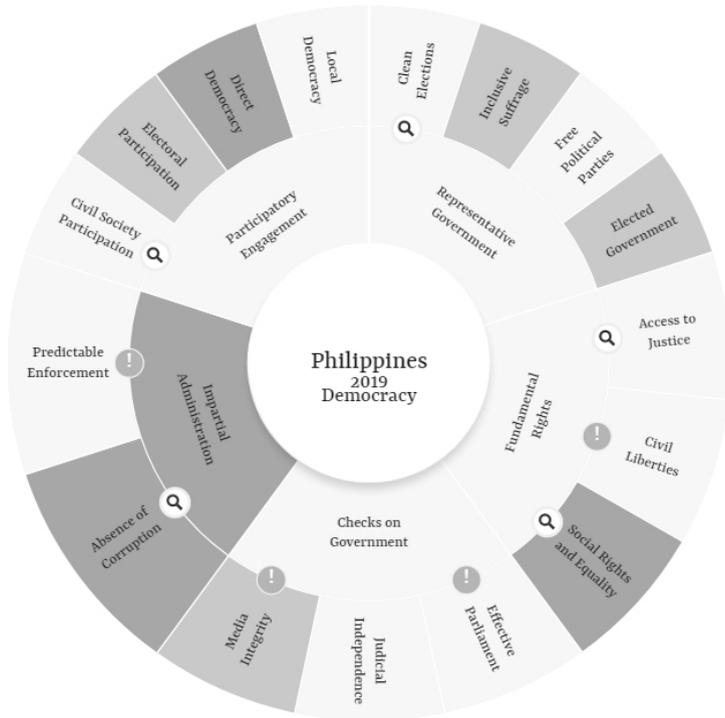


FIGURE 1. Philippines Country Profile in the GsoD and Global Monitor
Source: International IDEA (n.d.)

When the pandemic hit, International IDEA applied the GsoD framework to look into the pandemic measures enacted by governments around the world to see COVID-19’s impact on democracy. In 2020, International IDEA, together with the European Union, launched an online platform gathering information on the pandemic response of 162 countries called the “Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights.” According to Cats-Baril, the key lesson taken from the Global Monitor is that underlying conditions matter. “What we really see when we zoom out and look at the regional perspective [in Asia and the Pacific] of

the impact of COVID-19 on democracy is that democracies that were already strong got stronger and ones that were weak or backsliding further weakened,” she said.

In pre-COVID-19 times, the Philippines saw a trend of democratic backsliding. From being a mid-range performing democracy, the country became a low-performing democracy in 2019. Events during the pandemic only exacerbated the pre-existing trends. An example Cats-Baril gave was the highly militarized response to the pandemic which led to the arrest of more than 120,000 people for violating COVID-related restrictions. There have also been reports of people who experienced degrading treatment while detained. Before COVID-19, the Philippines was already seeing the militarization of government, high reliance on arrests in implementing the rule of law, and a decline in human rights protection. Cats-Baril reiterated, however, that this is not unique to the Philippines and that how every country responded to the pandemic seemed to have strengthened existing trends.

One major observation from the Global Monitor is the role played by emergency powers in the pandemic response of most countries. Declaring states of emergency (SoEs) allows the government to enact different procedures to respond effectively to the pandemic, but they also often provide the foundation for democratic compromises in terms of oversight and procurement processes, the concentration of power in the executive, restrictions in freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and fundamental rights. International IDEA tracked these restrictions in relation to SoEs and found that 62% of countries implemented measures that are of concern from a democratic and human rights perspective.

In the case of the Philippines, different legislative and constitutional measures were used to implement emergency powers. An SoE was not declared but emergency procedures were used to expedite legislative processes. This includes the passage of the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act or Republic Act No. 11469 in March 2020, which in itself allowed for a number of emergency measures. In 2020, President Rodrigo Duterte also declared a state of calamity and a state of public health emergency which are currently still in effect.

These SoEs allowed for easier procurement of medical supplies, the enforcement of mandatory quarantine, and access to quick response funds for government agencies and local governments.

In terms of multilevel governance, the difference in the responses of federal and centralized countries can be seen in the Global Monitor. It was found that the type of system of government did not have a profound impact on the pandemic response effectiveness. In some countries, COVID-19 justified further decentralization for more responsive governance. In others, COVID-19 revealed tensions and weaknesses in the federal system. This shows that the spirit of true consultation and coordination in multilevel systems is essential and, in some cases, there will be a need to develop new mechanisms to enable more coordination.

Cats-Baril noted that an interesting observation in the Philippine COVID-19 response with respect to multilevel governance is how the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) responded with its new levels of autonomy. This new autonomy afforded the BARMM the ability to create their own task force at the local level more quickly, have their own institutional innovations, and mobilize more resources. “[Their] COVID response has really allowed for the Bangsamoro Autonomy to shine, and maybe can serve as a sort of petri dish or a way to explore what federalism or further decentralization might look like in the Philippines in the future,” she said.

Another example of democratic innovation in the Philippine COVID-19 response is the early adoption of guidelines for the operation of Congress during the pandemic. The Supreme Court also entered into a digitalization partnership with Microsoft which enabled remote appearances of parties to court hearings. Cats-Baril ended her presentation on a hopeful note that, “these are things that, hopefully, will last and . . . the silver lining that we can carry from these kinds of processes which might actually improve people’s access to justice and remove some barriers . . . There is a way that the pandemic could have pushed us to innovate that can improve democracy and enrich it for the future.”

Global Health Governance: Examining Responses of International Institutions to COVID-19

Herman Joseph S. Kraft

*Convenor, Strategic Studies Program, UP CIDS
Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines Diliman*

Professor Herman Joseph Kraft discussed the emerging trends in the response of international institutions to COVID-19 based on the discussion on a similar topic in one of the panels in the 5th Katipunan Conference hosted by the Strategic Studies Program in 2020.

In Professor Kraft's presentation, global governance referred to the capacities of multiple institutions beyond the level of the nation-state to interact with state and nonstate actors in pursuit of common goals and objectives. "Therefore, we talk about the notion of governance [in this particular context] as in [international institutions] being able to mobilize resources and support for a response against the pandemic," Kraft said. For instance, at the regional level, this is seen in the concept of "ASEAN centrality" as observed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in how it positions itself as a hub between providing a basis for institution-building and for promoting engagement in multiple areas, including the economic, political, and the sociocultural.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kraft identified the World Health Organization (WHO) as among the institutions taking on the role of leading global health governance, with its capacity to "encourage governments to cooperate through the adoption of international norms and its enforcement at the national level;" and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI Alliance), which is defined as "a global health partnership of public and private sector organizations dedicated to 'immunization for all'" (WHO, n.d.).

According to Kraft, the presence of multilateral institutions would have one expect that it would lead to creating a coordinated

global response especially under conditions of a pandemic. Yet, he added that much of what the world is seeing now seems to suggest otherwise: “The transnational nature and impact of COVID-19 should have strengthened cooperation and multilateralism . . . Clearly, this was not the case.” This can be observed particularly with regard to vaccine accessibility.

As a global health network, one of the major roles of the GAVI Alliance is to ensure that every country in the world has equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and to advance further cooperation in its development and distribution. However, Kraft pointed out that the dilemma of accessibility is also compounded by limitations in the manufacturing of vaccines: “Vaccine manufacturing is limited only to a few states [that have] the resources and the capability [to do so]. The problem is that those same countries that have the resources and the capability to oversee the production of vaccines are also placed in a situation where their own populations are also subject to the [impact] of the pandemic.”

This leads to issues of vaccine nationalism, or the “action of countries prioritizing themselves to increase their protection and vulnerability against the [COVID-19] virus” (Lagman 2021, e375). These countries “are in a position to [either] buy the vaccines [directly] from the manufacturers or are where the vaccines are manufactured, which means that they are in a [better] position to access vaccines,” Kraft said. He added that it remains to be seen whether GAVI has been instrumental in mitigating inequality where access to COVID-19 vaccines is concerned.

With vaccine nationalism is also the notion of vaccine diplomacy or health diplomacy, where medical supplies and vaccines are used by countries “to advance diplomatic goals.” Kraft cited what seems to be a race in the conduct of vaccine diplomacy between China and India. “But again, the willingness of countries to actually engage in vaccine diplomacy is a function of how much they are affected by the COVID-19 situation,” he noted.

Although vaccine diplomacy indicates a change in the way geopolitics is being conducted, Kraft maintained that the state of

geopolitical conditions in the Asia/Pacific region remains the same: “The pre-existing conditions that defined the geopolitical situation in the Asia/Pacific region prior to COVID-19 are, essentially, the same kinds of conditions that exist now.” This suggests that institutional response to COVID-19 at the regional level has also been lacking, such as in the case of Southeast Asia. “What comes out here is that there has been little that we’ve heard about ASEAN being able to actually mobilize support among its members as a way of responding to the pandemic,” he added.

Based on these assessments, Kraft emphasized the need to further institutionalize and strengthen international and governance mechanisms in the region moving forward into a post-COVID-19 scenario.

Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippine Constitution in the Time of a Pandemic: Responses of Governance Actors and Challenges

Maria Ela L. Atienza, Ph.D.

*Co-Convenor, Program on Social and Political Change, UP CIDS
Professor, Department of Political Science, UP Diliman*

Professor Maria Ela Atienza discussed the findings and analysis of the “Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippine Constitution,” a joint project between UP CIDS under its Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC), and International IDEA, which started in 2018, and a follow-up project which looked at the implications of COVID-19 on the performance of the 1987 Constitution, again with UP CIDS and International IDEA working together in 2020. Professor Atienza also noted that the information in her presentation can be found in the projects’ publications: (1) the *Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippine Constitution: Summary of Findings*; and (2) *Constitutional Performance Assessment in the Time of a Pandemic: The 1987 Constitution and the Philippines’ COVID-19 Response*.

Atienza first presented the two projects’ framework and methodology. This framework devised by International IDEA is composed of a multi-pronged approach that allows for a nuanced analysis of whether shortcomings in constitutional performance are a result of poor substance or poor implementation. Constitutional performance is assessed through internal and external criteria. Internal criteria refer to the Constitution’s self-defined goals. On the other hand, the external criteria look at the Constitution’s design using normative criteria on constitutional design in accordance with global practice and theory. The 1987 Constitution was assessed using the following external criteria: (1) democratization; (2) decentralization; (3) social justice, human rights, and gender; (4) peace and conflict resolution; and (5) economic development.

Compliance with these criteria is then categorized in a “thin” or “thick” sense. Thin compliance is observed through the evidence as

to whether institutions were set up, appointments were made, and laws were adopted in a timely manner. Having thick compliance, on the other hand, means the constitutional design areas meet the substantive goals set out in the constitution and other normative goals.

Atienza then identified the nine constitutional design areas studied for the assessment. These are: (1) electoral institutions; (2) legislative-executive relations; (3) the judiciary; (4) accountability institutions; (5) local governments; (6) rights; (7) security sector; (8) economy and labor; and (9) citizenship and equality.

Atienza then gave a summary of the key findings of the original assessment (Table 1). The original assessment found that overall, there is only thin compliance with the internal criteria. This means that the technical requirements in the Constitution have been met including the establishment of institutions, holding of processes such as elections, and enacting necessary laws and actions. However, thick compliance with the internal criteria is lacking in terms of meeting the goals set in the Constitution and enacting laws mandated by the Constitution. On the external criteria, although notable progress has been made, there is still limited or thin compliance in promoting substantial democratization, decentralization, social justice, human rights, and gender equality, peace and conflict resolution, and economic development. The study recommended combining amendments in the Constitution with the passage of new laws, amendments of existing laws, administrative reforms in specific agencies, and stricter implementation of existing laws to address the challenges identified in the study.

TABLE 1. Key Findings of the two Constitutional Performance Assessments of the 1987 Constitution

| Constitutional Design Area | Original Assessment Key Findings | COVID-19 Assessment Key Findings |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Electoral Institutions | Since 1987, elections have been fairly regular although they cannot be described as fully free, fair, and competitive due to a number of policies that should have been passed based on the 1987 Constitution. Such policies are the establishment of special voting processes for persons with disabilities (PWDs) and the illiterate and other laws relating to political party reform and elections. | A challenge faced by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) during the pandemic was the delay in voter registration for the 2022 elections and in holding the Palawan plebiscite. While COMELEC managed to overcome these issues, it is now facing challenges in preparation for the 2022 elections and passing policies and safeguards to ensure that the elections will be safe, fair, and competitive. |
| Legislative-Executive Relations | The dominance of the executive is present despite provisions for the separation of powers and checks and balances. This was made possible by weak political parties and poor representative mechanisms. | During the pandemic, the dominance of the executive branch only intensified, and the accountability and oversight functions of Congress were not fully exercised especially in relation to the emergency powers granted to the executive. There was also the issue of the two Houses of Congress prioritizing bills and actions that were not directly related to the pandemic such as the Anti-Terrorism Act and the non-renewal of ABS-CBN's franchise especially during a time when access to information about the pandemic and government policies is very important. |

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|-----------------------------|---|--|
| The Judiciary | The dominance of the executive hampered the supposed autonomy of the judiciary. Members of the judiciary have also received threats from the other two branches in the exercise of its constitutional powers. | Not only have the operations of courts been affected by the pandemic; the judiciary has also been burdened with cases of quarantine violators, activists who were red-tagged, and drug users and pushers who continue to be persecuted in the midst of the pandemic. The pandemic also did not stop the threats and killings of members of the judiciary and the justice system. But there were also some positive innovations such as the digitization of court procedures and hearings via video conferencing. |
| Accountability Institutions | While accountability institutions were set up in accordance with the Constitution, their independence is challenged and threatened by other institutions. | Accountability institutions will have to play a critical role in protecting human rights and in auditing pandemic funds. |
| Local Governments | There are a number of local government units (LGUs) that are maximizing many of the powers and responsibilities set out in the Local Government Code of 1991 and in the Constitution. However, the study also found the uneven performance of LGUs due to the lack of prioritization, | Local governments still show unequal performance although some LGUs were more innovative and were able to build partnerships with different governance actors to address the challenges caused by the pandemic. |

resources, and skills in some LGUs and unevenness in the presence of civil society organizations.

| | | |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Rights | There are extensive rights enshrined in the 1987 Constitution but these are not evenly implemented and respected across sectors, such as women and indigenous peoples, among others. | Citizens' rights should not be invalidated even under a state of health emergency. However, rights violations were observed as a result of the implementation of quarantine rules such as an increasing number of illegal arrests and deaths related to the pandemic and inhumane treatment of vulnerable sectors. |
| Security Sector | The Constitution is clear in its mandate for formal security sectors but civilian oversight remains difficult to implement. | The pandemic response has increased the role of the traditional security sector. Former and retired military generals were placed at the helm of the government's pandemic response. As such, the implementation became more militaristic in its approach as opposed to a more public health-centered approach. Civilian oversight over the security sector remains poor. |
| Economy and Labor | Until 2020, the Philippine economy has been improving but poverty remains a challenge, and inequitable development and corruption exist across regions and sectors. | Due to the pandemic, the country is in a recession resulting in a rise in unemployment and the vulnerability of groups such as overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), health workers, those in the informal economy, among others. |

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Citizenship and Equality | There is inequality in terms of the active participation of citizens, particularly in the area of representation and participation. | The pandemic has seen a rise in the active participation of the citizenry. Community pantries, community kitchens, and citizen barter systems were set up by groups of people across the country. The private sector and civil society have also been participative in many government responses and call out the government when necessary. |
|--------------------------|---|--|

What then has been the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of the 1987 Constitution? Atienza said that the follow-up assessment found that areas already identified as problematic were intensified, and areas performing well are being challenged as a result of the pandemic. She summarized the findings of the COVID-19 assessment showing how each constitutional design area was affected by the pandemic (Table 1). Despite the threats and areas of concern identified, the COVID-19 assessment also recognized some positive innovations. These include reforms in the judiciary and local government sectors which could inspire more institutional policies and programs to aid the constitutional performance towards its goals on decentralization, autonomy, and social justice.

“While the future of the amendment process is currently on hold or unsure, it remains critical to continually assess the ways in which the 1987 Constitution is fulfilling its goals and the ways in which it is being challenged,” said Atienza. Echoing the recommendations of the first assessment, she reiterated that improving constitutional performance can be achieved even in the absence of constitutional change. To fulfill the goals of the 1987 Constitution, formal institutional changes and non-legal reforms such as strengthening democratic political parties, groups and actors, processes and values is equally important. This is especially true as threats to democracy and various rights continue during these uncertain times.

COVID-19 and the Governance of Information Systems

Jalton G. Taguibao, Ph.D.

*Convenor, Program on Data Science for Public Policy, UP CIDS
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, UP Diliman*

Assoc. Prof. Taguibao opened his presentation by outlining the policy research studies that the Program on Data Science for Public Policy (DSPPP) is currently venturing towards. Taguibao stressed the idea that knowledge, information, and data are very critical with respect to not only the explanations behind the pandemic and COVID-19 but also on how we understand and how we appreciate the situation. He also pointed out that this pandemic is also an infodemic; it means that, because information is such an important resource, the pandemic is not without contentious issues—conscientiousness when it comes to the relationship of data, information, knowledge, and how we consume this. Moreover, the United Nations (UN) has pointed out that the massive infodemic that comes with this pandemic is really constituted by disinformation and misinformation, and it exacerbates the crisis that we are in. But at the same time, in the present situation, a pandemic is really a time when citizens look to their government at all the different levels, from the local to the national government. Citizens wait for reliable and rapid access to useful and relevant information. He emphasized that one of the more difficult challenges of any government is really to be able to distinguish the information noise from the signal or the trusted information that needs to be disseminated and cascaded to citizens. At the same time, because the pandemic is also an infodemic, there is an overabundance of information, misinformation, and disinformation from the different media sources and information sources.

Taguibao continued his presentation by stressing the need to examine information systems mainly because they are critical—what we know of the pandemic is based on the information that we have about it and information systems are critical because these are systems where data and information are managed at the speed

that is required by a situation. There is urgency in managing data and information, and what they are for. There is a need to collect information so that the public will be able to have informed decisions for our policies, but at the same time the public also has to be able to distinguish critically useful and relevant information, and those who are stewards of information will have to effectively disseminate the needed information to citizens. In the course of doing this, different technologies, whether they are analog, digital, or even automated, definitely have the potential to improve our public health conditions.

Dr. Taguibao proceeded in presenting one of the studies being conducted by the DSPPP, that is, the governance of information systems focusing on the Philippine case. The presentation talked about the four aspects of governance of information systems: (1) the very governance framework that is in operation that affects the information systems that we have thus far; (2) the information and communications conditions and even their structure; (3) national-local information dynamics, and finally, (4) the information, content, and the messages or messaging that we have experienced ever since COVID-19 started.

Taguibao underscored that when we talk about the governance framework, we try to look at the primary government documents and reports, the different memoranda disseminated by different government agencies, from the Office of the President to the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the Department of Health (DOH). He pointed out that there are two terms that are common to these documents: a “whole-of-government approach,” and a “whole-of-society approach.” These two terms are always regurgitated even in the press briefings of the Presidential Spokesperson when answering questions on government responses to COVID-19.

He proceeded in defining the two terms based on the policy literature and scholarly literature, which this government is actually adapting. First, in a whole-of-government approach, there’s an acknowledgment that different government agencies have shared goals, objectives, and that these actually come together and have to

be coordinated by the government at the national level down to the local level. But to adopt this requires strong and effective leadership because a whole-of-government approach necessitates control and command, not necessarily through authoritarian means, but through more control and command management approaches. He emphasized that a whole-of-government approach requires transparent, clear information, and coherent messaging. The second terminology, called a “whole-of-society” approach, mentioned by government agencies, for instance like the DILG, means that they are adopting an approach that first and foremost intends to engage multisectoral stakeholders to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes. It also acknowledges specific stakeholders—civil society, the private sector, communities, academia, media, NGOs, voluntary associations, even down to specific personalities and individuals. Taguibao posits a caveat to this, that the implications of this particular approach, when it comes to information and information systems, is that information and messaging are meant to build partnerships and inclusive networking to be able to address a crisis, in this case, COVID-19. Therefore, these two approaches, in fact, have been scattered around the different official documents of our government, but they have been used interchangeably.

Taguibao then presented 2019–2021 data and explained some of the observations made during the study. First, there is a noticeable shift in the expansion of media use by citizens from analog towards mobile digital communications. Using 2019 as a baseline, he stressed the said shift. Second, the data shows that there is an expansion in internet usage in the past three years and the past two years when COVID-19 happened. Next, there is increasing social media usage. There is a shift in the people’s dependence and reliance on sources of news towards social media in comparison to other news and information sources, such as television and radio. Next, there is a reliance and pattern consumption of mobile social media content. Now it’s not just social media, but mobile social media content. Taguibao highlighted that there have been clear strides in the expansion of our information and communication technology (ICT) structures. And finally, the national government has encouraged local governments to go digital, and examples of these would be

incentivization policies, projects, and programs having to do with digitizations and ICTs at the national level, where local governments are actually invited to pilot in what would be a digital governance award that the government or the national government gives to local government units (LGUs).

According to 2019 data, fewer than half of the households in the Philippines have communal radios, with the majority of the population still watching TV. Seventeen percent have internet access at home. He pointed out internet usage and activity among households (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2. Using the Internet by Activity.

Source: DICT (2019)

Taguibao then presented an SWS study, which shows that in 2019, 60% of Filipinos source their information from television, and 21% source their information or news from Facebook. Meanwhile, 15% get their information from the radio. He also pointed out that 99% of adult internet users in the Philippines are actually Facebook users. Moving to the 2021 data, there were 73.91 million internet users in the Philippines as of January 2021. It rose to 6.1% and internet penetration in the Philippines is at 67%. The Philippines also has 89 million social media users, and there has been a 22% increase in social media users in the last two years during the pandemic. The number of social media users is equivalent to about 80.7% of our total population. There is also definitely a jump or an increase in the use of mobile technologies from 2020 to 2021 at 138.2% of our total population. This means that members of the Philippine population

are owning more than, probably, two devices or more than one mobile connection for data.

This leads to Taguibao's point that in terms of how information has been encouraged by the DILG, wherein they have responded by creating ICTs and encouraging LGUs. In terms of national-local dynamics, there have been different innovations by our local government units. LGUs have maintained websites; they have maintained official social media pages as a response to the reality that social media users are a growing audience. But at the same time, LGUs were left to manage the cascading of information from the national government to their local areas. The dissemination and cascading of information and advocacy was also seen, for instance, in the vaccine development plan and advocacies and behavioral change strategies that the national government espoused. He also highlighted that LGUs used innovations in information systems for their contact tracing, as seen in the case of Valenzuela City, Parañaque City, and Baguio City.

He then moved his discussion towards the ideal traits of a whole-society information system and messaging. It is expected that the government must be transparent, credible, clear, consistent, and timely; the government must have a defined tone and appeal and be able to segment its audience. However, since not all the members of the target audience use digital means of communication, the government should still communicate through analog means, and trust should be built towards its messengers. He then cited a recent issue brought about by a particular memorandum that the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) aims to convey only positive messages and favorable news. With regard to content and messaging, the national government's news and information agency is explicitly expressing the agenda behind the information that it releases to the public. He also pointed out some data visualization problems from the website of the Department of Health regarding the number of COVID-19 cases per region. In Figure 3, by visually comparing the daily cases during the period between May to September 2020, the graph presents that Central Visayas has more daily COVID cases due to the peaks in the line graph compared

to that of the National Capital Region (NCR). But Taguibao noted that upon closer inspection, NCR was averaging 1,000–2,000 cases, while Central Visayas, on average, has around 200–400 cases. The same data visualization problem arises in the tracker for daily deaths due to COVID when comparing NCR and Davao region for the period October 2020 to February 2021.

Data Visualization (dohgov.ph/covid19tracker)

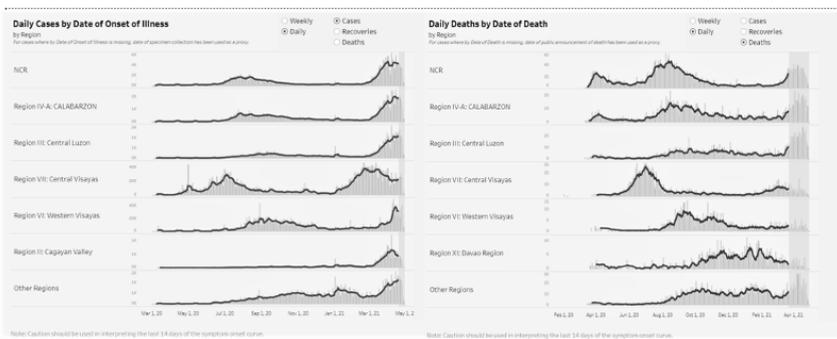


FIGURE 3. DOH Tracker

Source: DOH (n.d.)

He summarized that public access to information processes has to be established. There are no established information parameters to justify shifts in policies, for instance flattening the curve, or the de-escalation or intensification of community quarantines. These are all related to information that has to be governed and managed, requiring the involvement of stakeholders. There are too many platforms, and there are also too many influencers, which the government, actually, is reaching out to. There is also ineffectiveness in separating the signal from the noise when making public announcements. Taguibao stressed the need to support LGUs, especially their information systems, particularly public health, surveillance, information, and the distribution of public services to local constituents. Taguibao recommends that we have to be able to address certain issues but we also see strides in the development of technical structural

information systems. The quality of COVID-related data should be managed, improved, and effectively disseminated. While there are policies regarding information plans, there appears to be no clear emphasis on the empowerment of local government units and other stakeholders. And LGUs and communities really need their support for these information systems.

Taguibao ended his presentation by outlining the various policy research topics that the DSPPP is venturing into. The Program intends to closely look into the asymmetries of various LGUs to provide at least and examine, through an audit, the information systems to look at feedback and response systems coming from LGUs and national agencies and look at the innovations and operationalization of the whole-of-society approach. He encouraged the audience to join the team should they be interested in the said topics.

OPEN FORUM

The open forum was moderated by Professor Jorge V. Tigno, co-convenor of the UP CIDS Program on Social and Political Change. The first question was *whether democracy was compromised during the health crisis/pandemic given the evident role of the military in the Philippine government's pandemic response*. According to Cats-Baril, involving the military does not necessarily mean that democracy is being compromised. But from other countries' experience, relying on medical experts in the pandemic response would have been better in order to address the health nature of the response. In the experience of the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the military was used to enforce lockdown restrictions and there were violations of human rights in terms of people being quickly jailed without a fair trial. She also cited the case of Thailand which was a very unique case in terms of the continual role of the military in politics. Thailand is an example of a country with a political culture around a military rule, acceptance of military rule, and also declarations of states of emergencies. Cats-Baril noted that in a way there is a sort of acceptance to the declaration of states of emergencies and the willingness of Thai people to adapt their lifestyles to restrictions that come along with that. The pandemic response has shown the existing extent of the military's influence in Thailand.

The second question centered on *how the government's handling of the pandemic response would affect the 2022 national elections*. Atienza affirmed that people's perception of the government's response to the crisis will affect how voters will assess the national administration's performance, as well as whoever the president will endorse in the upcoming elections. But because the Philippines does not have strong political parties and because popularity is very important, name recall is still very important especially in the age of social media. However, Atienza noted that it may not be the only factor especially with the pandemic affecting government projects

such as the Build, Build, Build infrastructure programs, which were supposed to be finished before the 2022 elections. As a follow-up question, Atienza was asked if the administration candidate for the next elections will be someone close to the president. She explained that with the current surveys, the administration is trying to get the public's sense of who among the president's team is the more popular candidate. But then like in 2016, Atienza noted that due to weak political parties, the Philippines' electoral system favors the bigger named candidates with political families and resources. There could also be surprise candidates.

In relation to this, one participant asked whether the Philippine government's position on the West Philippine Sea and the dolomite sand issues would be significant factors in the upcoming elections. Kraft noted that the issue of the West Philippine Sea is not an issue that is felt in the gut by Filipinos and therefore might not be something that might shape the choices made by people as far as the presidency is concerned. The dolomite issue is even less of a concern for the ordinary Filipino. The key issue for the elections, that might start shaping the way people look at candidates, is the effect of the pandemic, especially on the question of how quickly the economy can recover from the effects of COVID-19.

For the next question in the open forum, Tigno asked Kraft to comment on vaccines. In particular, his question pertains to *whether there is vaccine nationalism as well as vaccine resilience*. Kraft highlighted that the problem with vaccines is that although there are many kinds of vaccines that are coming out now, the source countries are actually the same. If those countries decide that priority should be given to its citizens and limit the distribution outside of their particular areas of jurisdiction, just like what happened in the European Union, for instance, and the United States under Donald Trump, then it limits the resilience or the potential resilience of countries that do not have their own sources and are dependent on sources coming from other countries.

The next question for Atienza was on *whether Filipinos should look to their provincial governments or LGUs rather than the national*

government, especially in addressing the social and economic fallout of their policies such as lockdown restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Atienza pointed out that based on the findings from her presentation, LGUs have shown innovative approaches and responses to the pandemic. She also highlighted two important findings in their study. First, not all LGUs have the capacity to actually address the pandemic, and it is not only because of lack of money or lack of resources. Some LGUs do not have the necessary skills or capacities to really address problems even if there are laws that allow them to act in preparation for disasters or calamities. The second is the possibility of focusing on some groupings of LGUs beyond the provinces that can pool resources and plans such as the possible strengthening of regional development councils and agencies and the creation of a regional or a Metropolitan Manila government or administration, with bigger responsibilities than the current MMDA.

The first set of questions for Taguibao was on *the validity of the current presidential surveys being performed.* Given the pandemic situation, can Filipinos question the methodology being used, the time period covered, concurrent issues when the survey was performed, the sampling method, and the population sampled? Taguibao confirmed that citizens can question the methodology of how the government conducted the surveys, and that particular survey firms have been quite open with their policies, questions, as well as statistical errors. However, Taguibao cautioned against how questions are framed and how to interpret the results. Given recent surveys showing strong support and satisfaction with the performance of the current administration, Filipinos must remember that surveys are just snapshots and that they have limitations. For example, there is a difference between the conventional face-to-face interview-based survey as opposed to a mobile online survey. As such, Filipinos need to see differences between these methods and find ways to check the validity, the reliability, and to question the results. Informed citizens should not just rely on surveys. They should look at other sources of information in order to validate if policies are working and if they address the social issues that it is meant to address.

In relation to the topic of vaccines, Kraft was asked about *how global governance institutions (i.e., WHO) are non-committal in their behavior*. Kraft pointed out that this is one of the major criticisms leveled on global governance institutions. Most of these institutions are effective only to the extent that states are actually willing to abide by the kinds of norms or agreements they actually come up with. In his presentation, he pointed out that the legal framework behind global governance was based on the capacity and willingness of states to actually translate these international norms and conventions into national legislation. He cited the COVAX facility as an example. What the COVAX facility was supposed to do was to help the less capable states to access vaccines from different sources, but it still remains to be a question of the willingness of the source countries to actually provide vaccines to developing countries.

For the next question, Tigno asked the panelists to comment *on the Philippine government's approach of putting more military men as key leaders in combating the issue of the pandemic instead of the health experts at the forefront of the government's response*. Cats-Baril pointed out that it is not necessary to say that all military people are bad or not experts in terms of health because there are obviously medics within the militaries who have expertise when it comes to operational tasks for example setting up quarantine centers or rolling out programs, like vaccines. There is expertise within the military, of course, but when it is prioritized as a matter of government strategy to intentionally militarize a response as opposed to elevating experts, it is problematic because of what it represents and the messaging it gives to the people. A follow-up question was raised to Atienza if the reason there are a lot of issues on red-tagging of popular initiatives like the community pantry is that the military establishment does not have that kind of health expertise needed during the pandemic response. She explained that the Philippine government's approach is rather than treating the situation primarily like a health crisis, there is a very negative take on any group that may decide to be helping people or may actually be a very good potential partner of the government. According to the 1987 Constitution, people's participation and partnerships of the government with the private sector and civil society organizations are enshrined, but what is

happening is that certain community and civil society initiatives are red-tagged, or at least suspicions about their intentions are immediately raised. Many of these accusations are coming from retired military personnel who are part of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). Cats-Baril agreed with Atienza regarding the importance of civil society and citizens' inputs in the government's response to the pandemic. However, she highlighted that the Philippine government and military tend to be institutions that are relatively closed to citizen inputs, which affect the response in terms of accountability and transparency.

The last question centers on *the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation on social media*. A participant asked if Taguibao would recommend that the government "filter" the internet traffic in the Philippines. He explained that if the government acts on particular content that is going around the internet, this is considered censorship which is a violation of freedoms or civil liberties. There are alternative ways of addressing misinformation and disinformation such as the presence of information watchdogs or fact-check groups that are more civil society-oriented. These alternatives are a better approach rather than filtering or censoring internet traffic and content.

Podcasts of the webinar’s presentations and open forum can be streamed on the UP CIDS Podcast Channel:

Episode 1: Monitoring COVID’s Impact on Democracy: The Philippines and Beyond

<https://sptfy.com/MultilevelEP1>

Episode 2: Global Health Governance: Examining Responses of International Institutions to COVID-19

<https://sptfy.com/MultilevelEP2>

Episode 3: Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippine Constitution in the Time of a Pandemic: Responses of Governance Actors and Challenges

<https://sptfy.com/MultilevelEP3>

Episode 4: COVID-19 and the Governance of Information Systems

<https://sptfy.com/MultilevelEP4>

Episode 5: Q&A: The Pandemic and Policy

<https://sptfy.com/MultilevelEP5>

A replay of the webinar can also be viewed on the UP CIDS Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/upcids/videos/1421958938142248>

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EVENT PHOTOS

MULTILEVEL CRISIS GOVERNANCE: INTERNATIONAL AND PHILIPPINE RESPONSES AND PROSPECTS IN THE MIDST OF PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

Third installment of the UP CIDS "Philippine Public Policy in the Time of a Pandemic: Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge" Webinar Series

29 April 2021 (Thursday) | 3:00 - 4:30 PM (PHT) | Zoom Webinar & Facebook Live

SPEAKERS:



A Global Monitor of COVID's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights

Amanda Cats-Baril
Regional Advisor, Constitution Building in Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA



Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Constitution in the Time of a Pandemic: Responses of Governance Actors

Maria Ela L. Atienza, Ph.D.
Co-Convenor, UP CIDS Program on Social and Political Change
Professor, UPD Department of Political Science



Global health governance: Examining responses of international institutions to COVID-19

Herman S. Kraft
Convenor, UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program
Professor & Chair, UPD Department of Political Science



COVID-19 and the Governance of Information Systems

Jalton G. Taguibao, Ph.D.
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COVID-19 SA HANGIN?
A WEBINAR ON THE LATEST UPDATES
REGARDING THE AIRBORNE
COVID-19 VIRUS

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OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Nathalie Africa Verceles¹

Magandang araw po sa ating lahat.

I hope you are all safe and doing well amidst the unrelenting COVID-19 pandemic. On behalf of the Program on Health Systems Development (PHSD) and the Decolonial Studies Program (DSP) of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) and the University of the Philippines Center for Women and Gender Studies (UP CWGS), thank you for being virtually here with us in this session entitled COVID-19 sa Hangin? A Webinar on the Latest Updates Regarding the Airborne COVID-19 Virus.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis that is unparalleled in our lifetimes, and it continues to wreak extensive devastating social and economic impacts, especially for individuals who belong to the most marginalized sectors. It has been highlighted that the pandemic has exacerbated preexisting social and economic inequalities. On a personal level, the pandemic has reordered our lives dramatically, each of us in distinct ways, and there is still no certainty when it will end.

¹ Dr. Nathalie Africa Verceles is the director of the University of the Philippines Center for Women's and Gender Studies

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, we have been bombarded with both information and misinformation on the COVID-19 virus. Those of us who are very interested in understanding the virus in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones have devoured these sources that are readily available through the internet. We have found contradictory assertions, erstwhile facts that were proven wrong and subsequently corrected, and the growing body of new knowledge on the virus, as well as on the vaccines developed to combat the virus. With respect to the airborne transmission of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 or SARS-CoV-2, a 2021 study by Tang et al. has already dispelled myths such as aerosols. Aerosols are droplets with a diameter of five micrometers or less, all particles larger than five micrometers fall within one to two meters of the source. If it is short range it cannot be airborne, and if it is airborne, surgical masks or cloth face coverings will not work.

We have come a long way in understanding the virus, how it is transmitted, and how to protect ourselves from the first time it came into public consciousness in late 2019 and early 2020. We are so fortunate to have with us this afternoon Dr. Antonio Miguel Dans, a professor at the UP College of Medicine, who will provide us accurate updates on the airborne COVID-19 virus. In the context of a pandemic, information is truly power, and we recognize that a widespread understanding of the COVID-19 virus is critical in order for us not to get sick, not to spread the virus, and thus protect others, and most important of all, in order for us to effectively defeat it. Until then, please get vaccinated, wear a mask, practice appropriate physical distancing, avoid crowds and areas with poor ventilation, wash your hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes, clean and disinfect surfaces, and monitor your health daily. I wish all of us a most enlightening afternoon.

Maraming salamat at magandang hapon po sa lahat.



MAIN PRESENTATION

Dr. Antonio Miguel Dans²

As an introduction, Dr. Dans stated that his presentation was prepared together with his wife, Dr. Leonila Dans, and through the Healthcare Professionals Alliance Against COVID-19 (HPAAC). HPAAC is a loose alliance of about 160 healthcare professional organizations, involving doctors, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, medical technologists, and others.

The presentation focused on the evidence on airborne transmission, its definition, the various preventive measures, and the use of proper ventilation to combat airborne transmission of COVID-19.

Dr. Dans explained that there are three modes of transmission of respiratory viruses. The first mode is transmission through droplets, in which larger particles fall after one to two meters because of their size. The second mode is fomite transmission. In this mode, these particles land on surfaces such as our hands or tables, and they can be transferred from person to person. The third mode is airborne transmission. Dr. Dans stated that it is surprising that the airborne transmission of COVID-19 was only acknowledged after more than a year since the start of the pandemic.

² Dr. Antonio Miguel Dans is a Professor at the University of the Philippines Manila- College of Medicine and the Convenor of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Health Systems Development.

For Dr. Dans, air does not quite capture the concept of airborne transmission. He explained that the Tagalog translation of air or wind is *hangin*. So, when he talks to his patients, he uses *hininga* or “breath” to better explain it. The difference between air and breath is that the latter lingers in the air and spreads far due to its very fine particles.

Dr. Dans cited the July 2020 statement of the World Health Organization (WHO) on aerosol transmission, which states that the organization is still discussing and evaluating if COVID-19 can be transmitted through aerosols. The WHO also sponsored a study on March 24, 2021, saying that they cannot conclude the airborne transmission of the virus yet because they are not able to consistently culture the virus from the air. Dr. Dans explained that this method involves acquiring samples of the air and examining how the virus will grow and reproduce from that specific sample.

However, Dr. Dans argued that there are several proofs of airborne transmission of COVID-19. He presented three reports to support this. The first report is on the Skagit Valley Chorale in the United States, where 53 members of the 61-member choir were infected with COVID-19 during one practice session. The transmission happened when the index case, who was in the front row, was able to spread the virus as far as 10 meters away. According to Dr. Dans, it was unlikely that the virus spread through droplet transmission because of the distance.

Another incident happened in a bus in China where nine people were infected with the virus. Dr. Dans highlighted two things in this case. First, the index case was seated at the back of the bus, yet he infected another passenger who was four and a half meters away. When the video recording inside the bus was reviewed, it was revealed that the two passengers did not touch each other nor had any common fomites. The second and more interesting aspect was when another passenger who boarded the bus 30 minutes after the index case left was also infected. Besides the bus exposure, there were no other sources of infection that can be traced. Dr. Dans stated that this incident showed that the virus remained suspended inside the bus, even after the index case’s departure from the vehicle.

The third and most convincing proof according to Dr. Dans happened in the middle of 2020 in an isolation apartment in Korea (the report about this incident was published in March 2021). An index case on the fourth floor was able to transmit the disease to residents from the first to the eleventh floor. The residents wondered how this happened, thus they traced it to the vents. Dr. Dans stated that the apartment's ventilation system was all vertical, which means that those who were infected shared the vent. Dr. Dans argued that this is very convincing proof that there is airborne transmission—the virus lingers in the air and reaches far.

Due to these cases, Dr. Dans noted that several scientists became angry due to the persistent denial of airborne transmission. There were articles condemning this denial, and he cited one article which was written by Professor Trisha Greenhaigh of the London School of Public Health. The article stated that there is a need for the public health community to act without further delay. It then presented 10 pieces of evidence proving that COVID-19 is not only transmitted through droplets of bodily fluids but is also transmitted through breathing.

Dr. Dans noted that the WHO finally gave in, and on April 30, 2021, the organization inserted information about airborne transmission to their website. He quoted this line, which states: “[T]he virus can spread in poorly ventilated and crowded indoor settings where people tend to spend longer periods of time. This is because aerosol remains suspended and can travel further than one meter.” He emphasized that this information was already accepted, yet there was no news conference and no announcements about it. It even took a few days before people noticed the additional information on the WHO website.

Given this development, Dr. Dans proceeded to discuss how different our responses should be from our current practices to prevent the airborne transmission of COVID-19. He noted that there is a big difference in terms of protective equipment. For droplet transmission, respiratory hygiene is enough. This includes coughing into one's elbow or handkerchief, but for airborne transmission,

a high-quality mask that fits well is needed. He explained that N95 and filter masks are of high quality, but they are expensive. A cheaper alternative is the KN95 mask. Dr. Dans further noted that a surgical mask alone will not work because it does not fit the face well. He recommended double masking, which means wearing a cloth mask over a surgical mask to tighten the surgical mask's fit. Another way to prevent airborne transmission is to triple-layer cloth masks. Dr. Dans highlighted that face masks should also be worn indoors because the virus lingers in the air. This is different from droplet transmission where face masks can be worn within droplet distance (approximately two meters).

Furthermore, Dr. Dans recommended that healthcare workers should wear full personal protective equipment (PPE), especially if they will conduct aerosol generating procedures such as intubation. He recommended that frontline healthcare workers should also wear full PPEs even if there is no aerosol-generating procedure. Another critical difference that Dr. Dans noted is that for airborne transmission, there is a need to reduce crowding and spending time in crowded, indoor spaces. For droplets and fomites, transmission can be prevented by avoiding direct contact such as hugging, kissing, and handshaking, but for airborne transmission, air quality should be changed. This can be done through proper ventilation in indoor settings (i.e., changing indoor air with outdoor air regularly). Compared to surface sanitation and handwashing, Dr. Dans acknowledged that air sanitation is very expensive. Thus, he recommended that proper air sanitation can be achieved through filters and other procedures to sterilize the air. Most importantly, he stated that particle contact can be avoided by moving as many activities as possible outdoors. Religious ceremonies, social gatherings, work, markets, restaurants, and other activities should be held in open spaces.

In the succeeding part of the presentation, Dr. Dans showed a diagram of what aerosol transmission is like. He explained that without ventilation, the aerosols remain suspended in the air and become more concentrated. This is different from droplets that immediately fall. Dr. Dans highlighted seven factors that affect the

airborne transmission of diseases. First is the number of people. If there are more people in a room, aerosols will accumulate faster and will spread quicker. Second is the size of the room—the virus will spread faster in smaller rooms. Third is ventilation—is there fresh air coming in and can old air come out? Fourth is the length of time that people are staying in the room. If an infected person stays in a room for a long time, more aerosols can be transmitted, and more people can get infected. Fifth is the type of activity that the people are doing. The virus can spread ten times faster if people are talking and fifty times faster if there is singing or shouting. Sixth is the type of mask that people are wearing—are they wearing the three kinds of recommended masks? The last factor is distancing. If people are not observing social distancing, the virus will also spread easier.

Dr. Dans noted that some people have made equations correlating these seven factors and that these equations have been used by different investigators to create models. A model that he cited was developed by Jose Luis Jimenez from the University of Colorado. Three scenarios on the impact of distancing, masks, and ventilation on coronavirus transmission were studied in this model. The scenarios are a room, a bar, and a classroom.

In the room scenario, there were six people with one of them being infected with the virus. If these people only observed distancing and stayed together for a few hours, everyone would get infected. If they wore masks, four would get infected. Dr. Dans elaborated that even with the masks, the particles could still get through. The particles would then be suspended in the air and would become concentrated. However, he noted that if there is cross-ventilation (opening the window as entrance and opening the door as exit), less than one in five will be infected. He concluded that ventilation plays a big role in this setting.

The second scenario was a bar with 15 people and three staff members. The bar has 50% occupancy and everyone inside was socially distanced. If the people in the bar only observed distancing, 14 out of the 15 will get infected. If they wear masks, 10 will get infected. Dr. Dans noted that this is still a significant number. But if

there is mechanical ventilation that will allow fresh air to come in, then only one to two people will get infected.

In the classroom scenario, the index case was the teacher. If there is distancing, 24 students (half of the class) will get infected after two hours of classes. If they wear masks, 19 students will get infected. With cross ventilation through open windows and doors, only one in 24 will get infected. Dr. Dans stated that ventilation, specifically cross ventilation, is very important.

Since the models exhibit the significance of ventilation, Dr. Dans explained the different ways to measure if there is sufficient ventilation. One way is by measuring airflow in cubic meters per minute. He stated that the WHO recommends 10 liters per second per person in a room. However, he does not recommend doing this since it is hard to measure airflow. For those who are interested in doing so, Dr. Dans explained that measuring airflow involves measuring the wind speed (e.g., fan, air conditioning unit), in meters per second. This should then be multiplied by the smallest opening in square meters, which will result in the airflow in cubic meters per minute. The airflow needs to be multiplied by 1,000 to convert it from cubic meters to liters to find out if it is compliant with the WHO recommendation. Lastly, Dr. Dans emphasized that there is still a constant—if ventilation is only one-sided, this will only achieve 5% of the target ventilation. But if there is cross-ventilation (entry and exit of air), it will be 65%. Dr. Dans recognized that this computation is complicated and instead, some people buy devices to measure wind speed and airflow. Even with these devices, Dr. Dans argued that factors like the number of people and the size of the room are not accounted for by this method.

Another method of measuring ventilation is through air change per hour. This implies measuring the frequency of air change in a room within an hour. Dr. Dans argued that this is another complicated method because the size of the room and the number of people in the room should also be considered. According to Dr. Dans, the recommended number of air changes in an intensive care unit with COVID-19 patients is six times per hour.

Dr. Dans' recommendation is measuring air quality, which involves measuring the carbon dioxide concentration in the air in parts per million using infrared technology. According to Dr. Dans, there is a device that measures carbon dioxide concentration, but it is expensive (costing Php 2,000.00). He suggested to those who are interested in purchasing to share with friends and family. He also noted that this device is useful for building operators and owners. Dr. Dans pointed out that it is important to examine carbon dioxide concentration because it is a measure of rebreathed air—the amount of air we breathe that comes from other people. If there is carbon dioxide concentration, it means that it is possible to get infected with virus that comes from the breath of other people. Going back to the seven factors that Dr. Dans previously discussed, he emphasized that if there are many people staying inside a crowded room, carbon dioxide concentration will increase. Moreover, Dr. Dans explained that the United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) stated that more than 700 parts per million of carbon dioxide pose the risk of infection. This risk becomes higher if the concentration reaches 1,000 parts per million. Dr. Dans stated that in the last decade, the lowest target for atmospheric carbon dioxide is 415 parts per million. This number is also considered as fresh air. However, decades ago, the lowest atmospheric carbon dioxide is about 300 parts per million. According to Dr. Dans, some schools in the United States use a carbon dioxide measuring device in their classrooms and the device sets off an alarm if it reaches 1,000 parts per million. Once this happens, classes need to temporarily stop, windows need to be opened, and people need to leave for a while. People will be allowed to go back inside once the carbon dioxide concentration goes down.

Dr. Dans demonstrated how he used the carbon dioxide monitoring device in his own dining room. He explained that after an hour of keeping the windows closed, the carbon dioxide concentration reached 1,000 parts per million. When the windows are opened, the concentration went down to 800 parts per million and when a fan is turned on, it went down 750 parts per million. When Dr. Dans allowed for cross-ventilation, the concentration reached 650 parts per million. The lowest concentration he arrived at was 500 parts per million and this was achieved when he opened his doors and

windows to allow better air circulation. Dr. Dans stated that this experiment does not necessarily have to be conducted daily, but it is important to try it especially at home and in the workplace to make the necessary adjustments to the ventilation. He further explained that the most effective type of device uses infrared technology.

With the different measures Dr. Dans discussed, he noted that the burden of reducing air contact, ventilating public spaces, ensuring that there is clean air, and moving facilities to open spaces falls on the people. He argued that this is not fair, yet it is difficult to pressure those who are in power to do their part. He quoted a tweet from Prof. Benjamin Barr, a public health professor at Liverpool University, “Too much public health research is focused on changing the behaviour of the powerless rather than changing the powerful.” Dr. Dans argued that this is very true, and this is the reason why there is so much inequity in the country’s COVID-19 response.

Dr. Dans then discussed the challenges faced by the Philippines in terms of pandemic response. He stated that crowding is a big problem, especially for the poor who live in cramped spaces. In addition, policymakers have caused inadvertent crowding through vaccination and the limitation of public transportation during the height of the pandemic. The latter has resulted in crowding in vehicles and workplaces. He also noted that well-ventilated places are limited since most open spaces (UP Diliman, beaches, etc.) are closed, yet closed spaces are open. This means that people can crowd in a bus, yet they cannot go to parks. Dr. Dans argued that these are examples of how the people have not put enough pressure on those who are in power. This is crucial because the powerless do not make the policies.

Dr. Dans concluded his presentation by saying that disasters and tragedies shake the world, yet they lead to improvements in the way we live. Durable skyscrapers and metal structures emerged from a fire that razed Chicago in 1835, subway stations and elevated train stations evolved after a blizzard in the East Coast of the United States in 1888, the 1832 cholera epidemic in the United Kingdom led to one of the first public health interventions, developed the modern sewage

systems, and resulted in modern health innovations that increased people's longevity from 30 years old to 70 to 80 years old. He argued that this is what should happen in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to evolve, pressure the powerful, and change their behavior rather than carry the burden on our shoulders. He argued that at the end of the day, the people have the power thus it is critical to vote wisely.

OPEN FORUM

Moderated by Dr. Marie Aubrey Villaceran³

Question 1

The open forum began with a question from the moderator, Dr. Marie Aubrey Villaceran. She asked Dr. Dans about the delay in the news about the aerosol transmission of COVID-19. She emphasized that with timely and more proactive information, the increase in the number of infections could have been prevented.

Dr. Dans responded by saying that there is a scientific explanation for this. For scientists, absolute proof can be achieved by getting samples of air and by observing if the virus can grow from that sample. However, Dr. Dans highlighted that this is a difficult process. In fact, scientists were growing the virus from vents and filter materials, and they even wanted to grow it in the air. Considering this limitation, indirect evidence has been accepted like the Skagit Choir incidence, the apartment in Korea, the bus in China, and many others.

Dr. Villaceran's follow-up question was about the possibility of erring on the side of caution. She explained that since COVID-19 currently has a high transmission rate and many people are dying from the disease, it might be best to be more cautious to prevent the further spread of the virus.

Dr. Dans acknowledged that there are severe restrictions when it comes to airborne transmission, thus severe precautions should also be observed. He explained that it was possible that asking the public to observe stricter precautions would mean imposing too

³ Dr. Marie Aubrey Villaceran is the Convenor of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Decolonial Studies Program

much. However, Dr. Dans agreed that this has delayed our control of the pandemic. He stated that even science has its limits and that we should focus on what we could do moving forward. We should acknowledge the problem, change the policies, and get over the problem as soon as possible.

Question 2

The next question came from an audience member who asked if it is effective to use air purifiers for indoor settings and if so, what are the specifications that should be considered.

According to Dr. Dans, the best way to clean the air is to observe the protective measures that he discussed. This includes ventilation and using the carbon dioxide concentration monitor. For areas where it is difficult to lower carbon dioxide concentration, e.g., buildings or rooms with small windows, no ventilation, etc., it is important to clean the air through high-efficiency particulate absorbing (HEPA) filters. HEPA filters can sift through very fine particles, even those that are as small as one micron in diameter. Dr. Dans also stated that the small purifier necklaces are ineffective. He explained that in one minute, we breathe about eight liters (8,000 cubic centimeters) of air. Meanwhile, air purifier necklaces are only capable of cleaning 100 cubic centimeters of air.

Question 3

Another audience member (Ms. Karen Ling) asked if the UV lamps being sold in the market are effective in cleaning the air.

Dr. Dans stated that UV lamps can sterilize for sure. These lamps are being used to sterilize operating rooms. However, he warned that a person cannot stay inside a room with a UV lamp on. Hospitals and clinics use these lamps if there is an infected patient or after the patient has been discharged. It is important to sterilize the room since the virus can be suspended in the air for many hours. Dr. Dans noted that it is not advisable to use UV light in a frequently occupied room because the light is bad for the eyes, and it can also cause sunburn.

Question 4

For the next question, an audience member asked about Dr. Dans' recommendation to use three layers of cloth mask. She asked if it is sufficient to use one layer if the fabric is thick

Dr. Dans clarified that it is not about the thickness of the cloth, but what is important are the pores—the distance between the fibers. He also stated that he has not seen a recommendation on using thicker cloths. Some recommended using three to five layers to ensure the effectiveness of the masks. Moreover, Dr. Dans explained that using handkerchiefs as masks is insufficient. He encouraged people to use three layers of cloth masks because they are inexpensive and washable. He also recommended cheaper KN95 masks, which cost about Php 10.00 per piece.

Question 5

Dr. Eduardo Tadem asked about the role of vaccines in reducing airborne transmission. In addition, he asked if there is a correlation according to real-world data.

According to Dr. Dans, some say that the vaccine prevents the disease from getting worse but does not really prevent transmission. However, Dr. Dans argued that does not mean vaccines do not prevent transmission. Examining if vaccines prevent transmission requires a different study design. For example, it has been proven that the flu vaccine reduces incidences of pneumonia in patients. Dr. Dans explained that this is proof that the flu vaccine prevents transmission. He noted that this proof came years and years after the world has started to use flu vaccines. A similar situation may happen with COVID-19, but he mentioned that there is already indirect evidence using real-world data. He cited the United States as an example. The country was experiencing a surge in cases, but a month after they started vaccination, there was a very rapid decline. The same pattern was seen in the United Kingdom, Israel, and other countries that implemented massive vaccinations. For Dr. Dans, there is evidence that shows that vaccines prevent transmission.

Question 6

Another audience member asked Dr. Dans about the recommended type of PPE that should be used in handling COVID-19 patients. The audience member also asked if it is necessary to wear coveralls or if it is enough to wear gowns and N95 masks.

Dr. Dans' response was that full PPE should be worn when dealing with a COVID-19 patient.

Question 7

The succeeding question was about UV lights. An audience member asked how long a UV lamp should be turned on and how often should it be used in a treatment area.

Dr. Dans stated that a UV lamp should be turned on for about 15 minutes. He added that UV lights can also be used to sterilize vehicles in between use.

Question 8

Mr. Delfin Ramirez asked if aerosolized sterilization (sterilizing sprays) would help with preventing airborne transmission.

Dr. Dans said that aerosolized sterilization is being used in some areas, but he noted that it is very dangerous because we need to understand that aerosols are dynamic. Breathing is continuous and that the virus can also continuously be transmitted. He explained that using aerosolized sterilization can only clean the air for a few breaths. This means that when the spray goes down and a person goes somewhere else, the virus will still be in the lungs, throat, and nose. There are also cases of anaphylactic shocks upon using such sprays, where the bronchioles spasm. He concluded that aerosolized sterilization is dangerous and ineffective for sanitizing the air, but it can be used for surfaces. Moreover, Dr. Dans emphasized the importance of HEPA filters, ventilation, and air change. He noted that he brings his carbon dioxide monitor and a portable electric fan to

restaurants. He asks permission from the restaurant if he can use the monitor and the fan, especially when it is crowded.

Question 9

The next question was about the effectiveness of using sterilizing boxes, which are used in government offices.

For Dr. Dans, immediately wiping surfaces and materials touched by other people is helpful. This prevents the transmission of the virus through fomites. He mentioned that in their household, they leave items they bought from the grocery untouched for 24 hours. If they need to use an item right away, then they need to wash it. Dr. Dans noted that the virus cannot last very long if it does not reach a human host. Therefore, it is safe to leave surfaces alone for a day.

Both Dr. Villaceran and Dr. Dans discussed that current preventive measures should focus on ventilation rather than sterilization. Dr. Dans argued that funds should be spent on ventilation because sterilization is quite expensive in the long run. Dr. Villaceran agreed and noted that sterilization measures tend to be harmful to the environment.

Question 10

An audience member then asked when it is safe to hold face-to-face classes and will carbon dioxide monitors be a good requirement to prevent the spread of infection on campuses.

Dr. Dans explained that when more places are properly ventilated and when more people are vaccinated, then it is safe to resume face-to-face meetings. Moreover, he highlighted the importance of redesigning the world we live in. This includes improving ventilation in classrooms and identifying ways to see when ventilation is being overwhelmed by the number of people and the duration of the activity. Dr. Dans stated that the saddest and worst thing that can happen to us is if we emerge from the pandemic exactly the same as when it began. If everything stays the same—transportation,

workplace, restaurants, indoor activities—the pandemic will be prolonged. This will predispose our children and our children’s children to another airborne pandemic. Dr. Dans emphasized how critical it is to prevent this situation, similar to the way waterborne infections were prevented by modern sewage systems. Moreover, there is an urgent need to change the world. Dr. Villaceran agreed and stated that everyone is treating the pandemic like a temporary glitch and that the world will return to normal eventually.

Moreover, Dr. Dans talked about the implications of opening and closing the economy in response to the pandemic. He stated that lockdowns work, but the government should also consider how to properly lift lockdowns. Dr. Dans argued that there is a need to open up more open spaces and close enclosed spaces, and not the other way around. He further noted that policymakers are closing the safe places to go to and making the economy suffer unduly. A specific example of this is arresting sidewalk vendors. According to Dr. Dans, the government should bring markets out to the streets so people can shop from their cars and dine on the streets. Dr. Dans pointed out that the country lacks open spaces for leisure and shopping, thus we go to malls and department stores. He argued that in many countries, some streets are turned into open spaces. Dr. Dans believes that the same is done in more countries, the world will be a better place to live in and future airborne pandemics will be prevented. He also reiterated the importance of voting wisely to ensure that public officials can make the right policies.

Question 11

For the next question, an audience member asked if there is any evidence that says that the virus spreads more quickly in places with cold temperatures like malls.

Dr. Dans responded by citing that a surge was expected during the cold months in 2020. However, this did not happen. The current thinking is that there is no proof that weather or temperature are major determinants of infection rate.

Question 12

Another audience member asked if indoor plants help in preventing airborne diseases.

According to Dr. Dans, indoor plants are generally good, especially for the environment since they produce oxygen. However, he explained that it should be carbon dioxide that should be reduced. He stated that plants will also absorb carbon dioxide, but not fast enough. Humans quickly produce carbon dioxide, and this is at a rate of eight liters per minute. After an hour, humans can produce around 500 liters of carbon dioxide. He concluded that indoor plants cannot sufficiently prevent the airborne transmission of COVID-19.

Question 13

The succeeding question was about the proper usage of KN95 masks—since KN95 masks are more expensive than surgical masks, can they be reused, and for how long? The audience member also stated that buying frequently buying KN95 masks can be costly for people with jobs that require them to be in front of people, and if companies do not shoulder these costs.

Dr. Dans stated that hospitals change twice per shift (about every four hours). However, he explained that there are safe ways to dry and reuse N95 and KN95 masks to extend their use. He recommended for the audience member to look that up. Dr. Villaceran added that there are UV boxes for the sterilization of masks, although they are also expensive.

Question 14

Another question was about the necessity of wearing face shields or are face masks sufficient.

Dr. Dans pointed out that face shields are required by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Infectious Diseases (IATF)

and that there are studies that prove that face shields can help reduce the transmission of airborne diseases. However, the evidence for this is indirect, and that there is no specific proof that supports that face shields can prevent the transmission of COVID-19. He added that face shields serve as added protection, but they are not required. According to Dr. Dans, the country's policies that penalize individuals who are not wearing face shields should be debated. Policymakers can then decide if face shields should really be required. But for Dr. Dans, he would just follow the policy should policymakers continue to require it. He reminded the audience that the enemy is the virus, not each other. He also called for everyone's patience and the need to discuss things that matter, particularly ventilation and emerging from the pandemic a better world than we came in.

Question 15

The next question was related to prolonging the use of masks by letting them dry under the sun, considering that the masks were used to handle COVID-19 patients.

Dr. Dans acknowledged that many people are worried about mask disposal. He emphasized that since we believe that masks can filter the virus from the air, then we should also believe that the masks can contain the virus. When we remove the mask, the outer layer should not be moved because the viral particles are on that surface. He explained that reusing masks pose several dangers, especially since the material gets degraded. Dr. Dans noted that there are recycling strategies for N95 masks, but it is more difficult for surgical masks since they are thinner and more fragile. Meanwhile, cloth masks can be washed. He advised that it is best to dispose of surgical masks rather than reuse them. He stated that it is important to be aware of the dangers of reusing masks because they collect viral particles and degrade when we reuse them. In addition, Dr. Villaceran reminded everyone to dispose masks properly. She stated that garbage collectors can also be infected through the masks that are being thrown.

Question 16

An audience member asked for advice on how to encourage employees to consistently wear masks in the workplace. Dr. Villaceran added that this can be related to issues of information dissemination, specifically making the public realize the importance of wearing masks. She also noted that there are people who do not believe in the effectiveness of masks or who are not using their masks properly.

As a response, Dr. Dans stated that there are two options to approach these people: fight them or talk to them. He cited an example where he saw two garbage collectors being scolded by policemen because they were not wearing masks while they were taking their break. He noted that he does not agree with punitive measures and using fear to convince people to wear masks. For Dr. Dans, scolding the garbage collectors was too harsh, considering crowding in malls and buses is allowed. He argued that the best way is to use our intelligence and our ability to empathize with other people. Another example Dr. Dans provided is when people wonder why protective measures are still in place even when most cases are mild. Dr. Dans argued that it should be explained in a way that people will understand—those with mild symptoms or asymptomatic do not know that they are carrying the virus. They might be walking around in public places, and they can transmit the virus to more vulnerable individuals like senior citizens or those with existing illnesses. When the virus is transmitted to these individuals, it can cause death. Moreover, he argued that the Philippines needs leaders who can explain and not intimidate people so they will comply. He also highlighted the importance of educating and empowering the public and the people with power—the building owners, employers, and businesses so they can empower people to follow protective measures.

Question 17

The next question was about the use of ivermectin in preventing COVID-19. According to audience member, some take ivermectin

because they read articles that claim its effectiveness against the virus.

Dr. Dans explained that the studies done to examine ivermectin were conducted through small trials with low-quality designs. He stated that there are several ongoing trials, around 70 as of the last count. Dr. Dans stated that when a trial is ongoing, it is proof that the evidence on its effectiveness remains uncertain. If there is already sufficient evidence, these 70 trials would have stopped—they will be stopped by their respective ethics committees since there is already enough proof. Dr. Dans further argued that it is important to wait for the ongoing trials to find out if Ivermectin is effective. Moreover, Dr. Dans claimed that it is not safe to take ivermectin based on the probability that it can be effective against the virus. In fact, there are about 100 treatments that are being tested, so it is not safe to try all the various potential treatments for COVID-19. Dr. Dans also stated that they do not want to contradict those who claim that it is safe to take ivermectin and that there is also an agreement among his peers that they can still wait for a few months and wait for the results of the trials. Even the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) conducted its own trial, and he suggested it is best to wait for the results. For those who claim that ivermectin is the “only hope” against COVID-19, Dr. Dans argued that there is also a possibility that it will lead to false hope considering there are no definitive results yet. He stated that in medicine, it is not advisable to recommend treatment unless there is a certain level of certainty. There is also an agreement within the scientific community to wait for the results first. Once ivermectin is proven to be effective, then it can be taken against the virus. In the meantime, he recommended avoiding raising the hopes of the public for something that might not be true. He argued that medicine should not raise false hope.

As a follow-up to the discussion on ivermectin, Dr. Villaceran asked Dr. Dans if the drug is antiparasitic and antiviral. Dr. Dans explained that it is antiparasitic and that studies and that trials are exploring its antiviral effects. Moreover, Dr. Dans stated the importance of waiting for trial results before accepting or rejecting treatments.

Question 18

The last question was about the use of PPEs for health workers. The audience member asked how long they should stay inside a COVID-19 confirmed patient's room who is on a high-flow machine.

Per Dr. Dans, it is best to stay in the room in a short time as possible. He explained that the longer a person stays, the higher the risk of getting infected. Shortening one's exposure is one of the major strategies for reducing COVID-19 transmission.



CLOSING REMARKS

Instead of delivering the closing remarks, Dr. Villaceran asked Dr. Dans to give the most important reminders in terms of preventing the transmission of COVID-19.

Dr. Dans invited Filipinos to do two things. First is to understand airborne transmission and how different it is from droplets that fall after one to two meters on surfaces like floors and tables. He noted that both droplets and aerosols could be present in a room, thus it is important to take the necessary precautionary measures. According to Dr. Dans, aerosols are similar to smoke; therefore it is important to open the windows and doors or go to open spaces to let the air out and to avoid inhaling the contaminated air. This is the same measure that should be observed to prevent airborne transmission of COVID-19. He added that it is critical to face masks properly. This can be done by using masks that fit well, using three layers of cloth masks, double masking with surgical masks and cloth masks, and wearing N95 masks if permitted by one's budget. He added that it is important to avoid crowded places, especially staying for a long period of time.

Second, Dr. Dans asked people to pressure policymakers to rebuild the world that we live in. Currently, people are forced to travel in cramped vehicles and streets while and there are also instances of crowding in checkpoints. Cases of inadvertent crowding should be prevented, not promoted. Additionally, people should enforce workplace safety. Dr. Dans stated that there are already sufficient

guidelines and joint administrative orders on workplace safety, but these are not properly monitored and implemented. He added that policymakers can do something to make workplaces and transport safer. According to Dr. Dans, one silver lining in this pandemic is the creation of 400 to 500 kilometers of bike lanes. However, he noted that this is still very small especially in Metro Manila. He argued that more bike lanes should be created so that people have choices on how to get to work. Dr. Dans stated that before the pandemic, biking is a good exercise for our hearts and arteries because it can lower our cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure levels. Now, biking is a good way to avoid airborne infection. Therefore, it is important to improve access to such modes of transportation.

Dr. Dans emphasized the significance of our obligation to pressure our leaders to change the world to ensure that future generations will benefit from these changes. Moreover, he stated that it is important to listen to what people have to say about the pandemic because this will affect the upcoming elections. Choosing the right leaders can help us have a better world, thus it is critical to choose candidates who have the vision to change the way we live.



MAKING OUR WAY BACK TO THE CLASSROOM

EDUCATION CLUSTER



INTRODUCTION

The University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) held a roundtable discussion on the future of education in a lingering COVID environment entitled “Making Our Way Back to the Classroom.”

The virtual event was a strategic venue for government, private sector, and civil society organizations to tackle how the education sector is coping with the challenges of the pandemic and assess its readiness for face-to-face classes. Specifically, it sought to answer the following synergistic questions that concern all levels in the education sector:

- 1.) How is the education sector addressing the macro-level factors which are impacting it, either directly or tangentially, during the pandemic?
- 2.) How is the sector helping its stakeholders cope with their economic, spatial, physical, and health and psychosocial concerns during the pandemic?
- 3.) How is the crisis affecting the complementarity between public and private educational institutions?
- 4.) How has the transition been between K-12 and higher education during the pandemic?
- 5.) What must government agencies, private companies, and socio-civic organizations (e.g., HEI coalitions) consider and do to prepare for the return to face-to-face learning?

Speakers from the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) discussed mechanisms and strategies to ensure continuity of quality education programs, as well as opportunities for collaboration among stakeholders. Dr. Jan Carlo “JC” Punongbayan of the UP Diliman School of Economics moderated the roundtable discussion.

The webinar was spearheaded by the UP CIDS Education Cluster, composed of Assessment, Curriculum, and Technology Research Program (ACTRP), Education Research Program (ERP), and Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program (HERPRP).



OPENING REMARKS

Professor Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, Ph.D.

Executive Director

University of the Philippines

Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS)

Dr. Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem acknowledged the distinguished guests, partners, and speakers and welcomed the participants of the webinar. The webinar series was part of the 2021 activities of the UP CIDS, which aims to contribute to national development and knowledge creation through collaborative research and partnerships. Its channels to fulfill this vision include workshops, lectures, forum/webinars, as well as publications such as policy briefs, discussion papers, monographs, conference proceedings, and the *Philippine Journal of Public Policy: Interdisciplinary Development Perspectives*.

At present, the Center has twelve programs which constitute the following clusters: Education and Capacity Building Cluster, composed of the Education Research Program (ERP) headed by Dr. Dina Ocampo; the Program on Higher Education Research and Policy Reform (HERPRP) led by Dr. Fernando Paragas; and the Assessment Curriculum, Technology and Research Program (ACTRP) convened by Dr. Marie Therese Bustos. Completing this cluster is the Program on Data Science for Public Policy (DSPPP) whose convenor is Dr. Jalton Taguibao.

UP CIDS also has a development cluster which consists of the Program on Escaping the Middle-income Trap (EMIT): Chains for

Change (C4C), the Political Economy Program (PEP), the Program on Alternative Development (AltDev), and the Program on Health Systems Development (PHSD). And lastly, the Center has the social, political, and cultural studies cluster, consisting of the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC), the Islamic Studies Program (ISP), the Decolonial Studies Program (DSP), and the Strategic Studies Program (SSP).

In light of the current political, economic and sociocultural crisis brought about by COVID-19, the UP CIDS research programs from April 2020 onwards have revised their projects and activities to examine the impact of the pandemic and propose solutions to this public health crisis. The “Philippine Public Policy in a time of Pandemic: Confronting the COVID-19 Challenge” webinar series is an opportunity for UP CIDS to share the findings of its pandemic-related research work with the public, and solicit feedback from various stakeholders, which would then feed into public policy design and implementation.

The UP CIDS COVID-19 webinar series is divided into four clusters: the Governance Cluster by the Strategic Studies Program (SSP), Program on Data Science for Public Policy (DSPPP) and the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC); the Education Cluster comprising ERP, HERPRP and ACTRP; the Health Cluster, composed of the Decolonial Studies Program (DSP), the Islamic Studies Program (ISP), and the Program on Health Systems Development (PSHD); and the Development Cluster, consisting of the Program on Alternative Development (AltDev), Political Economy Program (PEP), and Program on Escaping the Middle-Income Trap: Chains for Change (EMIT C4C).

The first and second of this webinar series were the Development Cluster-led “Southeast Asian Peoples’ Alternatives in Pandemic Times” and the “COVID-19 and the Economy: Challenges and Opportunities,” held on March 9, and April 8, 2021, respectively. The third webinar was the Governance cluster-led “Multilevel Crisis Governance: International and Philippines Responses and Prospects in the midst of Pandemic Challenges,” which was last April 29, 2021.

The fourth webinar “Making our Way Back to the Classroom,” organized by the Education Cluster, sought to tackle how schools from basic education to higher education are coping with the challenges of the pandemic and preparing for the return to face-to-face learning. According to UNICEF, the Philippines is one of only five countries worldwide that have not reverted to face-to-face learning.

Dr. Encarnacion Tadem concluded by thanking the organizers of the webinar and hoped that the roundtable discussion would generate an interesting and relevant dialogue in light of the pandemic and would result in practical and informed policies to aid government officials, agencies, and other stakeholders.



PRESENTATIONS

The Basic Education in the New Normal

Undersecretary Diosdado M. San Antonio
Department of Education

Undersecretary Diosdado San Antonio extended his gratitude for the invitation to DepEd to share its policies and programs in the new normal. Amidst globalization, technological breakthroughs, complex environmental, health, social, and economic pressures affecting the education sector, the 2030 Basic Education Plan puts a premium on quality, while ensuring that the learners are ready to learn, and preventing and mitigating the learning and earning crisis from becoming a catastrophe, particularly for the most vulnerable.

The DepEd also continues to modernize basic education governance, expand access to basic education services, and respond to the needs of learners in terms of equity and resiliency. The DepEd ensures that the disadvantaged and marginalized children are also given the opportunity to continue to learn and to be resilient so they can exercise their rights and possess the life skills which help them participate in societal affairs.

On a limited basis, the DepEd provides teachers with the opportunity to meet their learners face to face, thereby allowing them to check on the learning progress of the students and provide needed instructional supervision and interventions. The guidelines to be issued by the Department of Education and Department of Health specifically indicate that limited face-to-face classes would

be conducted in low-risk areas. The pilot in-person classes would be voluntary and subject to compliance checks with readiness requirements. This would also require acknowledgment of shared responsibility among DepEd, local government units, parents, and other stakeholders.

Undersecretary San Antonio highlighted key lessons and good practices in effective blended learning, including parental involvement, student engagement, inclusion and equity, support for teachers, and community partnerships. The 2022 Basic Education Curriculum will cover essential learning competencies, with a strong focus on foundational skills and moral literacy. The DepEd will also attempt to rationalize technical and vocational education, particularly senior high school track offerings.

In terms of learning delivery, the DepEd hopes to adopt blended learning by combining the conduct of face-to-face classes, use of self-learning modules and technology, and more aggressive utilization of TV and radio lessons. The episodes would be available digitally in the database indexed by grade level, quarter, episode title, most essential learning competencies (MELCS) mapping, and curriculum guide code.

The DepEd will continue to produce learning materials, especially for TV and radio-based instruction and other needed learning materials for sub-modalities like self-learning modules, interactive materials, inclusive eBooks, and video lessons are available both in print and e-copy accessible for learners. The DepEd will also strengthen partnerships with stakeholders, including TV stations, universities, and publishers to ensure the broadcast of lessons anchored on quality learning materials.

The use of the DepEd learning management systems will also be maximized, ensuring learners' and teachers' access to gadgets, equipment, and the learner support system, and the availability of community learning facilitators, particularly learning support aids to support learners while studying from home.

In terms of instructional and monitoring plans, teachers will be required to prepare weekly home learning plans, home learning tasks, and individual monitoring plans. Self-monitoring tools for learners, parents, and teachers will also be developed.

Recognizing the importance of assessment in basic education delivery, the DepEd will pilot a phone-based assessment of learning, which can be used during the pandemic. This initiative is contingent on the availability of gadgets for both teachers and learners.

The DepEd will continue to implement mental health and psychosocial support programs at the central office, regional offices, and division offices. It will also continue to support private schools in basic education in the form of government assistance and subsidies. The Private Education Office (PEO) has been created in DepEd to strengthen the complementary roles between public and private schools as they promote inclusive basic education.

In conclusion, Undersecretary San Antonio again expressed his appreciation to the organizers of the webinar for engaging the Office of the Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction (OUCI) in the roundtable discussion. He also emphasized that in these challenging times, children are most important.

TESDA Abot Lahat: TVET Towards the New Normal

Executive Director David B. Bungallon

National Institute for Technical Education and Skills Development (NITESD)

Executive Director David Bungallon began his presentation by providing a context on the role of technical vocational education and training (TVET) in economic development. It deals with the acquisition of practical skills for various occupations in different sectors, including entrepreneurship endeavors. TVET is purposive as it is an education or training process where key skills or competencies for specific job roles are determined.

TESDA continues to uphold its commitment to serve and help its constituents face the different difficulties and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the pandemic, a COVID-19 recovery plan entitled “TESDA Abot Lahat: TESDA and TVET towards the New Normal” was crafted to transition TESDA’s systems, processes, and programs into the new normal and allow the agency to cater to the skills needs of the people.

This COVID-19 plan also prioritizes key sectors to jumpstart national recovery such as agriculture to support food security, health to contribute to public safety, ICT to minimize technological disruptions, and construction to revitalize the government’s ambitious build, build, build, infrastructure program.

At present, the country is in a structural phase where TESDA starts to put into practice new normal policies and programs pertaining to training delivery, assessment, and certification, program registration, among others.

During the survival phase, TESDA mobilized its resources and network to help its community survive. The workshops of TVET institutions were used to produce much-needed supplies from disinfectants to PPEs as well as food for frontline workers and their communities.

In Phase Two of the plan, the TVET sector transitioned towards a new landscape because of the changing environment brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the pandemic. After more than a year of the pandemic, TESDA ensures the continuity of TVET in Phase Three through various services that respond to the needs of the people—thereby improving the agility and flexibility of the sector through TESDA's process, policies, and systems.

The flexible learning delivery system was adopted as a policy that helped stakeholders to cope with all the disruptions brought about by the pandemic. The system recognizes the varying contexts and capacity of the TVET community to adjust to the situation, providing them with the option to make use of any flexible learning delivery modes—from face-to-face, online, blended distance learning, and a combination of distance learning and face to face learning delivery modes.

In support of flexible learning, TESDA developed and conducted the capacity building of trainers through the trainers' course on facilitating e-learning sessions and developing e-learning materials. These form part of the trainer's methodology level two under the Philippine TVET trainer's qualification framework. The trainer's methodology one is concerned with developing the trainer's capability to facilitate TVET, while the trainer's methodology two refers to the development capabilities of a trainer to develop curriculum and learning materials.

One of the successful services of TESDA during this pandemic is the TESDA online program, an e-learning massive open online course platform with more than a million learners. TESDA customized its learning management system that links regional offices and TESDA technology institutions to be able to provide blended learning for contextualized, area-based, and demand-driven TVET.

Aside from its online program, TESDA also introduced an app to facilitate the ease of doing business for learners. With the TESDA app, clients can access and get information on various services, including scholarships, training centers, and e-learning videos. In addition, TESDA has dedicated programs and services for OFWs,

from providing one-stop service centers to programs for the reintegration of returning migrant workers.

TESDA also implements scholarship programs to augment the country's economic recovery efforts, and the training for work scholarships for the TVET process is conducted in priority industries and key employment generators. Further, TESDA supports community-based TVET programs that promote self-employment and entrepreneurship activities.

The Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education for learners in state-run schools and the Tulong Trabaho Fund seek to reskill and upskill target beneficiaries, including employed workers. To help the learners, private institutions or TVET institutions, TESDA provides internet or communication allowance to learners and training and assessment subsidies to TVET institutions under its scholarship programs.

Before the pandemic, TESDA conceptualized the Philippine TVET 4.0 framework, which anticipates the various shifts and changes in the TVET sector. This framework remains to be a key source of direction in terms of ensuring that the sector addresses the challenge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This framework shows the different actions that should be taken at various levels to maximize the opportunities brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

It contains specific measures or strategies to ensure the right competencies are imparted to the TVET learners, trainers, and institutions. All of these initiatives serve as a guide for both public and private TVET providers alike to ensure they produce Fourth Industrial Revolution ready learners, trainers, and assessors and ensure that their TVET institutions and programs remain relevant to the Fourth Industrial Revolution standards.

In this COVID environment, TVET aims to provide responsive support mechanisms, including contextualized services, which contain targeted interventions for specific community needs. This approach is envisaged to contribute to demand-driven TVET, which

entails strategic and agile planning and flexible program delivery to respond to the needs of the TVET sector efficiently and effectively. This also involves the participation of the industry in identifying the required qualifications or the different job roles, to be considered in curriculum development and other aspects of TVET delivery.

The implementation of the Philippine TVET 4.0 framework also necessitates capacity-building for internal and external stakeholders to respond to evolving needs. Capacity-building initiatives include digital literacy and skills development programs for TVET service delivery. These also include coordination and collaboration with other sectors critical for TVET delivery, such as with the local government units and other agencies for infrastructure and education support.

Executive Director Bungallon ended his presentation by sharing that TESDA has an ongoing project called “Supporting Innovation in the Philippine Technical and Vocational Education and Training System.” The initiative will set up TVET innovation centers in the different regions which promote innovations in the TVET curriculum design, research and development, and entrepreneurial development.

Bayanihan in Philippine Higher Education

Chairperson J. Prospero E. De Vera III, DPA

Commission on Higher Education

Chairperson J. Prospero E. De Vera III started his video presentation by explaining the meaning of *bayanihan* which means cooperation among the Filipinos—it is a communal and civic unity, and in modern times the spirit of teamwork. This is the prevailing framework and theme that made possible the response of the Commission and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) during the worst of times during the pandemic.

When COVID-19 hit the Philippines in the first quarter of 2020, the CHED's strategy was to act fast by ensuring that a whole-of-nation approach was used, mobilizing the capacity and the expertise of universities on the ground. The Commission instructed all HEIs to adopt a flexible learning approach in education to close the semester, prepare for the next semester, and ensure that learning continues.

The universities were given the opportunity to determine what was the most appropriate learning approach based on the health situation on the ground, the consultation with local governments, the assessment of the capability of their faculty and students, their determination of the connectivity available in the area, and the availability of gadgets. The majority of the universities used a combination of online and offline options.

In 2020, under the direction of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), all state universities and colleges realigned their budget to meet flexible learning needs: procurement of laptops and tablets, getting stronger connectivity, and putting networks inside their universities. CHED helped address challenges of flexible learning as they came out.

One of the biggest problems in the rapid shift from traditional face-to-face to flexible learning was that there was a general lack of content that can be used in flexible learning. So through bayanihan,

the Commission launched CHED Connect, a website where learning materials can be accessed by both faculty and students. Major universities, top universities, both here and abroad, contributed materials. In 2020, the Commission also trained about 189,000 faculty members in different universities on flexible learning.

The CHED also identified problems of flexible learning outside the jurisdiction of the Commission, particularly connectivity and the availability of the internet infrastructure inside the campuses. The Congress responded to the CHED's call by allocating ₱3 billion for the development of smart campuses across the country, ₱600 million for subsidies for students and faculty members who were affected by the pandemic.

At the height of the pandemic, the CHED also recognized the situation of the hundreds of thousands of faculty members who needed to be trained for flexible learning. To address this issue, the Commission launched the CHED Higher Education Bayanihan (CHED HiEd Bayanihan), which allows universities to train their own faculty and train the faculty of higher education institutions.

The CHED also acknowledged that some courses or subjects simply cannot be taught online. The Commission adopted a policy to slowly allow some limited face-to-face in certain geographic areas and certain degree programs. From July 2020 to January 2021, CHED secured approval from the President to allow limited face-to-face classes in medical and allied health programs in MGCQ areas and HEIs that have students that are serving in COVID-19 hospitals.

Chairperson De Vera emphasized that attending limited face-to-face classes is not mandatory. Students and their families are free to choose whether they would want to do it or not, and universities that wanted to do some face-to-face classes were to apply for it.

The decision to allow limited face-to-face classes in certain degree programs was also anchored on the realization that there are certain degree programs where hands-on training was needed. To ensure the safety and protection of stakeholders in the coming months, the CHED lobbied with the IATF to upgrade the category of

the frontline educational workers from B1 to A4. The CHED is also pushing for the vaccination of students who will do limited face-to-face classes.

Some of the things that the universities did at the height of the pandemic were to produce research materials useful for the government, and find creative ways to help the government manage the pandemic, including the production of face masks, face shields, and disinfectants. CHED provided grants to more than 50 state universities and colleges to continue making masks and disinfectants and provide psychosocial support for students and faculty.

The Commission and state universities and colleges assisted local governments in establishing quarantine centers—28 state universities and colleges were used as quarantine areas, isolation units at the start of the pandemic, helping about 17,000 individuals.

In closing, Chairperson De Vera shared some of his reflections on higher education in the new normal. First, the digital divide exacerbates difficulties in adjusting to flexible learning, but the CHED is seeing from the experience of higher education institutions that innovations and adjustments are emerging. Both students and faculty members are able to adjust to flexible learning better now than before.

Second, the academe must now realize that it must be more participative and more willing in adjusting and exploring creative methods of teaching. Faculty members now realize the first problem of adjusting to the online now requires them to rethink the way they handle classes, the way they give assignments, and the way they determine how the class is managed. It requires a rethinking and an openness on the part of faculty members and administrators, to be flexible in the way they go about managing the educational system.

Third, from now on, flexible learning will be the norm. There is no going back to the traditional, fully packed, face-to-face classrooms. The Commission has adopted a policy that flexible learning will continue in the school year 2021 and thereafter. Going back to the traditional face-to-face classroom runs the risk of exposing

educational stakeholders to the same risks if another pandemic comes in, and wasting all the investments in technology, teacher training, and retrofitting of educational facilities. What is required is a flexible system for universities that will mix and match learning modalities—flexible learning methods that are appropriate to their situation

According to Chairperson De Vera, teachers must now realize that the old norms are gone, and they must adjust to new standards—having the openness to engage and spend time with students and use new technology that will make conversations better and deeper. Teachers must now regularly modify their syllabus and adopt new methodologies. There will be a transition from the exam-based system that depends on knowledge creation to group work and project or task-based systems, particularly in determining how to grade the students, and textbooks will no longer be the sole source of knowledge.

OPEN FORUM

Dr. JC Punongbayan, moderator of the webinar facilitated the question and answer (Q&A) portion by instructing the participants to type their questions in the Zoom chat box and Facebook comments section. Below were the questions raised and the responses from the speakers.

1.) What would you say would be the most challenging aspects of the pandemic response of your respective agencies as faced by students, parents, and teachers? What problem brought about by the pandemic worries you the most and what are you doing to address it?

According to Director Samuel Soliven, it would be more on the challenges experienced by the learners in poor households. In some households, there are two, three, or even more children learning together. To address this, the DepEd has instituted key measures and mechanisms such as hiring learning support aides (LSAs) to reinforce ongoing learning continuity interventions.

2.) Based on some students' experience in online learning, homes are not conducive for learning and attending Zoom classes. Do you think that this will exacerbate the learning gap or education inequality between rich and poor students? Do we have indicators assessing this dimension?

Director Soliven made reference to a World Bank study that shows a great disparity in terms of the learning experience of those rich countries over low-income countries. Recognizing that this issue requires a whole-of-nation approach, the DepEd partners with key stakeholders, with the local government units for example in the provision of technological tools for teachers and learners.

- 3.) *When it comes to textbook instruction, how difficult has it been to conduct these training programs online and what are the biggest challenges that you have faced?*

Executive Director David Bungallon confirmed that training is the greatest challenge in the delivery of technical vocational education since TVET entails actual or hands-on skills or equipment-intensive courses. For this reason, the TESDA designed a flexible learning modality to include blended learning—a combination of online and offline learning with face-to-face learning. The agency also strengthened the TESDA online program as a learning tool and introduced e-learning sessions for the trainers. In addition, TESDA lobbied with the IATF for some TVET programs to be allowed to conduct limited face-to-face learning.

A key challenge now is how the training institutions, the TVIs, can cope with the impact of this disruption including the impact of the fourth industrial revolution wherein most of the industries now will now shift to areas that address digitalization. Executive Director Bungallon agreed with Chairperson De Vera that flexible or blended learning is now the new normal.

- 4.) *With the proposed pilot runs for face-to-face classes from Kinder up until Grade 3, how prepared is the DepEd for this transition, and what are the sentiments of parents? Are they onboard with this? When students go back to face-to-face classes, will COVID tests, masks, and other precautions be required, and what about the vaccines? Are you also lobbying for children to be vaccinated especially with the delta variant which afflicts more children?*

Director Soliven mentioned that the DepEd Secretary will present the plan for pilot implementation of limited face-to-face classes. Based on the figures, the pilot will involve around 100 public schools and 20 more private schools. The DepEd and the Department of Health (DOH) are drafting joint guidelines to ensure that in the pilot implementation of the limited in-person classes, everybody's health, safety, and security will be guaranteed.

In June 2020, the Department released the DepEd Order 14, series of 2020, where it detailed various process flows and protocols on how to transition to the limited face-to-face. While schools need to open for children, all the precautionary measures should be in place.

Director Soliven also reported that the DepEd is monitoring the vaccination of teaching and non-teaching staff. In Region 7, 68.5% of the teaching and non-teaching staff are already vaccinated. Seven out of their 20 schools division offices are already inoculated.

5.) Reports indicate that there has been a surge in various online courses provided by TESDA during the pandemic and many have looked at the pandemic as an opportunity for retooling or upskilling, especially among repatriated and displaced OFWs. What courses are most popular among these repatriated OFWs and how exactly have TESDA's programs helped them to get back on their feet amid the pandemic?

Executive Director Bungallon shared that the TESDA online program system has been in existence since 2012 and until February 2020, it has been smoothly operated, serving those wanting to learn TVET through this mode. However, in March 2020, there was a surge in the number of users, with 20,000 concurrent users. The data shows that from March 16 to July 2020, there were 1.7 million users of the TESDA Online Program and 146,000 of these were OFWs.

For this year only, from January to July 2021, 43,000 OFWs have actually enrolled in the TESDA online program. The most popular courses among our OFWs are the entrepreneurship program, the human and health-related programs, and tourism-related courses.

For those who still prefer hands-on training, the TESDA advises them to go to a TESDA institution. They have to present their certificate of completion which is generated from the TESDA online program. They will be evaluated and required to take a national competency assessment for national certification after training completion.

6.) *How are your respective agencies helping stakeholders cope with the economic, spatial, physical, health, and psychosocial concerns during the pandemic? In the case of DepEd, although many students have grown used to the online setup, many still find it there rather difficult to navigate and some people even still drop out even with the reduced curriculum, and many face mental health problems. Based on some reports, there will be a significant budget cut, for example, for the school-based feeding program next year, which during the pandemic has been bringing food to malnourished and undernourished children in certain barangays. So what kinds of aid are needed to ramp up in the middle of the pandemic to reduce the stress experienced by students and their parents as well as their teachers?*

Director Soliven highlighted the importance of observing the support protocol for our teachers, learners, and households as well. For example, the DepEd coordinates with PhilHealth on the coverage applicable to learners, teachers, and personnel and works out a possible institutional arrangement with the agency. The DepEd shall also set aside an amount to subsidize testing for learners, teachers, and personnel, subject to the availability of funds and compliance with the budget and accounting regulations.

The health status of learners, teachers, and personnel who tested positive for COVID-19 and those currently in isolation or quarantine shall also be regularly monitored by the school or the office health personnel and in close coordination with the school's division office, the regional office, and even the central office. The learners, teachers, and personnel who tested positive or are under isolation or quarantine shall secure medical clearance and health certificate from their attending physician before they may return to school or office just in case.

In the DepEd, there are available platforms for learning and development, including teachers' training. In-service training for providing mental health and psychosocial support to teachers and other stakeholders is also in place.

7.) *As a follow-up question, have you seen data already when it comes to the alleged increase in mental health problems faced by our learners amid the pandemic, and how is DepEd responding to this?*

Director Soliven affirmed that the Department has been receiving reports regarding the stress and anxiety that COVID-19 has caused among learners, teachers, and parents. To help address this issue, the DepEd scaled up its Oplan Kalusugan where the mental health component is also being considered.

8.) *There are reports indicating that there would be a significant budget cut when it comes to the school-based feeding program next year. Is this a concern for the DepEd?*

In terms of the budget cut, the DepEd is in the process of defending its budget. The DepEd recognizes the value of the school-based feeding program. Physical nourishment is very vital in the learning process.

9.) *What kinds of assistance have you given to your students so far in the pandemic and how exactly have these programs or aid or help them?*

According to Executive Director Bungallon, TESDA provided flexible guidelines in the implementation of TVET programs, without compromising the quality of TVET. TESDA reviewed its scholarship guidelines, including the scholarship structure and fees. In the process, TESDA included in the scholarship fees, communication allowance for the learners so that they will be supported in doing their online learning and blended learning. TESDA also included insurance allowance, aside from the regular allowance that they are receiving and the toolkits they are receiving from the scholarship programs.

TESDA immediately designed and facilitated e-learning sessions with the trainers that capacitated them to run flexible learning.

TESDA also developed Competency-Based Learning materials to ensure the continuity of learning amidst the pandemic. The TESDA guidelines also ensure the safety of learners and trainers when they go to face-to-face learning. Compliance with the health protocols is a key requirement in authorizing TVIs to proceed with TVET delivery.

10.) Aside from having a leading role in the national employment recovery strategy of the government, TESDA has also played a leading role as well in the barangay development program of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). TESDA Director General Isidro La Pena on August 17 said that some allocations for scholarship and livelihood programs were meant for the benefit of the rebel returnees, residents of geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities. How big is this segment of TESDA's market and won't that eat away funds for the scholarships and other forms of aid for other groups such as OFWs?

Executive Director Bungallon emphasized that this did not actually affect the whole of the scholarship fund because a part of the scholarship fund is really intended for the community-based training programs that include the Poverty Reduction Livelihood Employment Program (PRLEP). The issue raised by COA pertains to the fund for the scholarship training programs that were implemented in the PRLEP areas. This is categorized under the community-based training programs that respond to the needs of the barangays, particularly those insurgent-affected areas. Subject to clearance by the Department on National Defense—the barangays/areas prepare and implement the proposals in collaboration with other agencies.

11.) As a quick follow up, do you have a list of these barangays that have received aid through TESDA under the barangay development program? Is the list regularly published?

Executive Director Bungallon confirmed that there is a list of barangays that received support from the TESDA. The Community

for Local Government Units Services (CLGUS) is responsible for continuous and sustainable technical education and skills development programs at the local level.

12.) In terms of complementarity between public and private educational institutions, the dynamics between the public and the private schools amid the pandemic, how has this changed from your perspective?

According to Director Soliven, the DepEd provides support through Education Service Contracting (ESC), a government financial assistance to deserving elementary school graduates who wish to pursue their secondary education in private schools; and Senior High School Voucher Program (SHS VP), a program of financial assistance wherein subsidies in the form of vouchers are provided to qualified SHS learners in participating private and non-DepEd SHS. The DepEd also provides financial support to senior high school students in the implementation of the Joint Delivery Voucher Program.

The DepEd statistics on enrollment also revealed that there were also learners from public schools who went to private schools. The DepEd continues to foster public-private partnerships in promoting quality education. In Bayanihan 2, an amount was provided to grade school learners who were affected by the pandemic.

The DepEd is also in the process of finalizing the policy guidelines for the creation of a private education office to be able to address the specific needs of private schools. It is hoped that the Private Education Office would eventually transition to a Bureau of Private Education this school year.

According to Executive Director Bungallon, the TVET structure is composed of private TVIs and public TVIs. Public TVIs include the TESDA Technology Institutions and LGU-run technical-vocational institutions. Without the private sector, TVET will not be successful. Once TESDA reaches its full absorptive capacity, it refers learners

to private TVIs. The number of TESDA administered schools is not enough to accommodate the demand for TVET.

13.) Some funds in Bayanihan 2 have been allocated for TESDA scholarships, but what percentage of this fund has gone to private techvoc institutions? What's the relative share that they got from the Bayanihan 2 aid?

Based on the full absorptive capacity of TESDA Technology Institutions, Executive Director Bungallon reported that 70% went to private technical-vocational institutions. Bayanihan 2 fund was very particular with the Tulong Trabaho Act, which caters to those workers who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, and as a result of the pandemic, those who require reskilling or upscaling.

14.) When it comes to the transition from K-12 to higher education, has there been any change when it comes to that as well?

Four batches of senior high school graduates (2018-2022) were produced under the K-12 Curriculum. Based on the Senior High School Trace Study conducted by the Bureau of Curriculum Development, most of the senior high school graduates go to higher education institutions. A good number of students also decided to be gainfully employed plus there were senior high school graduates engaged in entrepreneurial activities, while others ventured into middle-level skills to further their skills like in technical vocational education.

This study somehow gives a picture that the promise of the Department of Education in terms of the curriculum exit is being fulfilled. At this stage, the DepEd recognizes the need to strengthen its advocacies in promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that senior high school graduates have acquired. Building on this tracer study, the DepEd plans to gather more objective data in terms of the quality of education provided for the senior high school.

15.) *Is TESDA seeing more graduates of K-12 going into tech-voc programs? Are they using the pandemic as an opportunity to get into these programs, or are they still choosing college degrees instead? How has the job market changed in the pandemic, and how is TESDA responding to that change in terms of the courses offered?*

Executive Director Bungallon found it difficult to answer the second question. This is something that TESDA would also want to know. Although TVET actually caters to the high school graduates, particularly the K-12, it also caters to the college graduates wanting to gain skills or qualifications, and also to the workers for reskilling, upskilling, and the out of school youths for their skilling towards employment.

This is one of the challenges for TVET since high school graduates still see TVET as a secondary alternative in the education system. TESDA has been trying to explain that TVET is actually a bridge towards employment. As a matter of fact, there are a number of students in TESDA administered schools, particularly in the tourism sector, in the engineering sector, wherein the trainees are in the NC2 NC3 level courses.

During the previous administration, TESDA implemented the Ladderized Education Program which catered to those who really want to be degree holders but may not have the means. They can go to TVET, get work, and then support themselves, and then proceed to higher education. At present, TESDA is working on the credit pathways and equivalencies system which would also benefit DepEd because they have the Alternative Learning System (ALS); and CHED also in relation to their Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation (ETEEAP). TESDA also seeks to recognize the knowledge and skills acquired by K-12 graduates that have actually completed their tech-voc programs in K-10 to 12.

16.) *How do we align our program courses to the demand of the labor market?*

Executive Director Bungallon stressed that this is something that TESDA is working on. First, the sourcing process in TVET actually is to produce the area-based planning. Second, there is a need for the industry to develop competency standards. Third, the curriculum has to be formulated and vetted by the industry. TESDA also collaborates with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and industry to recognize the national certificate as a very important requirement for employment in enterprises and companies.

17.) *What do you think is the best way for your respective agencies to cooperate with the private sector and social civic organizations, especially given the increasing pressure to return to face-to-face learning? So, what are the avenues for collaboration between stakeholders at this time?*

According to Director Soliven, the DepEd promotes “Sulong Edukalidad” which provides opportunities for partnership and collaboration. The DepEd values the numerous assistance and support that it receives from public and private partners at various levels. The decision to transition from the school closure to the gradual opening of the schools, for example, was triggered by various calls coming from partners.

For TESDA, the private sector is an important pillar in TVET delivery. TESDA policies are anchored on the need to strengthen the participation of the private sector in policy development. The private sector is well represented in the TESDA Board–employer sector, the labor sector, and the private technical vocational sector.

At the regional and provincial levels, the regional technical educational skills development committee encourages the participation of the private sector, and the provincial technical education skills development committee ensures that the concerns and contributions of the private sector are included in TVET.

In the standard development, TESDA is reviewing the structure of the organization and engagement of industry boards. Industry boards are meant to address sectoral concerns and represent the industry in terms of standards development for the different qualifications that the industry needs. In terms of TVET implementation, TESDA promotes the dual training system which proves to be an effective training delivery mode; and the enterprise-based training, leadership, apprenticeship, and student industry learning where industry plays an important role.

TESDA is also trying to engage the industry in competency assessment and certification. For the private technical-vocational institutions, capacity building will remain a priority government intervention. The quality assurance framework ensures that TVET services are within standards.

18.) What is the process of locking in or identifying pilot areas for face-to-face learning?

The presentation of Undersecretary San Antonio emphasized that the schools must be in low-risk areas and must seek the concurrence from the local government units. Every region will get that experience to observe the pilot implementation of the limited face-to-face classes. The DepEd Executive Committee will issue specific guidelines on how to select the schools.

19.) Why did the DepEd decide to start with the youngest students in kinder up until grade three when they can be considered the group that is most vulnerable with basic education? What factors led to this decision?

Based on his personal view, Director Soliven explained that in the psychology of learning, the learners in the early grades like Kinder, Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3, need to develop social skills

aside from literacy and numeracy. When the learners are already in junior high school and senior high school, the learners already have some sort of independence in the learning process. The DepEd also takes into account the needs of the learners with disabilities.

20.) What are your thoughts on allowing vaccinated teachers and students back in the classroom? Can they be allowed to return to the classroom without waiting for a 70% vaccination rate or herd immunity?

As far as the TESDA technology institutions are concerned, there is a directive that all employees must undergo full vaccination. For the private sector, TESDA has been encouraging the institutions to ensure the safety of their learners and trainers. TESDA requires adherence to health protocols, particularly those enforced by LGUs.

Director Soliven cited that the country has a good number of vaccinated Filipinos and that's also a very important layer in the protection of everyone. Those who have been vaccinated would contribute immensely to facilitating that transition from remote learning to limited face-to-face [classes]. It is hoped that learners would also be eventually vaccinated.

21.) In the US, some parents do not insist that their children be vaccinated for whatever reason. As far as DepEd is concerned, will you be mandating or encouraging the vaccination of children later on?

The DepEd is really motivating and encouraging everyone to undergo the vaccination but it's really important that once the vaccine is there and children can avail of it, the Department will support this. In the end, the parents' decision over the children will prevail and will be respected by the DepEd and local government units.

22.) *How do DepEd, TESDA, and CHED foster quality assurance of the different learning modalities and how do you measure the success or how do you assess the success of an online learning program? How do you address the “learning loss” that is expected from this online or distance learning setup?*

Director Soliven emphasized that this is the concern of all. The school closure posed a lot of challenges, but these were somehow addressed through the implementation of the basic education learning continuity plan. Recognizing the importance of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective development in learning, self-learning modules, and TV and radio-based learning gained popularity. The DepEd also released the interim guidelines on the assessment of learners’ performance and conducted quality assurance of learning.

The DepEd acknowledges that there are studies indeed about learning loss and the transition from remote learning to limited face-to-face classes would hopefully help students recover from this learning loss. The DepEd will continuously navigate various strategies to ensure that the diploma and the certificates received by the children are of quality.

23.) *What about TESDA quality assurance protocols or assessments, how do you go about them?*

According to Executive Director Bungallon, quality assurance is anchored on the development of competency standards. Competency standards are developed by the industry, and these are converted into a competency-based curriculum. And the competency-based curriculum, [through] modules, ensures that the objectives are the achievement of the learning outcome that addresses the different tasks in that competency standards of the task of a job role. So that there’s assurance that all the tasks needed in a certain job role are covered in the competency-based curriculum.

Following the formulation of a competency-based curriculum, the development of the learning materials comes in. The competency-based learning materials are developed by the institution, but these are being evaluated at various levels. But when these are nationally initiated competency-based materials which were vetted by the industry, TESDA directly distributes these to training institutions.

The institutional assessment determines the achievement of learning outcomes, which can be undertaken either online or face-to-face. The assessment of TVET is not only knowledge-based but it's more skills-based accompanied by interviews or written exams that relate to the skills component.

Following institutional assessment, learners have to undergo the national assessment for national certification and program registration. The program registration ensures that all the administrative and curricular requirements are complied with. Every year or every two years after registration, the programs are being audited through a compliance audit.

24.) As we move from remote to face-to-face learning, how will the instruction change? It seems that going back to the face-to-face of the past is no longer viable and in this light, what policy cover will DEPED or TESDA central office release to help schools, divisions, and TVIs design and implement local solutions?

Borrowing the words of the Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction, Director Soliven highlighted the importance of using various learning delivery modalities with adequate support. In agreement with Chairperson De Vera and Executive Director Bungallon, the blended learning delivery modality will be here in the new normal. The DepEd will formulate a new policy that already integrates the results of the pilot implementation of the limited face-to-face classes.

Instead of going back to complete face-to-face, TESDA is encouraging learners and trainers to think that remote learning will continue during the pandemic and beyond—treating flexible learning as the new normal. Executive Director Bungallon emphasized that TESDA will continue capacitating the trainers with pedagogies related to Fourth Industrial Revolution and will strengthen scholarship programs that support learners and encourage institutions to improve their infrastructure that would address digital learning and flexible learning.



SYNTHESIS AND CLOSING REMARKS

Evangeline Amor, Ph.D.

Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs

University of the Philippines System

Dr. Evangeline Amor provided a synthesis of the presentations and discussions. Based on the discussions, it is evident that the education sector is not going back to its pre-pandemic state. As the sector moves towards the new normal, flexible learning would be the primary learning modality.

Dr. Amor highlighted six discussions points coming from the webinar:

- 1.) The government should continue its support to the education sector by strengthening the support to infrastructure in order to provide the necessary connectivity and gadgets to learners across the Philippines so that an effective flexible learning mode can be implemented;
- 2.) Given the new landscape, it is imperative to provide support to teachers for growth and professional development. School administrators can make this happen through their faculty development initiatives which should be effective. These initiatives may involve programs where teachers are capacitated to capacitate others, creation and building

of a community of practice among teachers is encouraged, a balance is struck in their professional life as teacher, researchers and even as faculty administrators, and, finally, promote understanding, rather than performance. With these faculty development programs; teachers will be invested in the education of the students;

- 3.) In order to move forward with flexible learning as the new normal, there should be alignment of the curriculum of the basic education, techvoc education, and higher education. Alignment should not just be within but also across these different levels of education. The curriculum should be responsive to the global and local needs of the people and quality-assured;
- 4.) There should be support for mental health and wellbeing of all stakeholders in education, so primarily for our faculty, for students and for the non-academic staff;
- 5.) There is a need to strengthen partnership and collaboration among stakeholders, which involves alumni, government and industry; and
- 6.) There should be effective communication for efficient coordination especially with respect to implementing the protocols that will be put in place, as the education sector makes its way back to the classroom, and ensure a safe school opening.

EVENT PHOTOS





UP CIDS Education Cluster

MAKING OUR WAY BACK TO THE CLASSROOM

How education institutions are coping with the challenges of the pandemic and preparing for the return to face-to-face learning

September 8, 2021
9AM-12NN



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Abot Lahat

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