



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

11.11.11
VECHT MEE TEGEN ONRECHT

PROCEEDINGS 2023

ADVANCING AND REALIZING ALTERNATIVE REGIONALISM

**SOUTHEAST ASIAN PEOPLES'
SOLIDARITY AND RESISTANCE
IN COVID-19 TIMES**

The Third Regional Conference on Alternatives
11-13 November 2021



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Lower Ground Floor, Ang Bahay ng Alumni
Magsaysay Avenue, University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City 1101
Telephone: (02) 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 4268 / (02) 8426-0955
Email: cidspublications@up.edu.ph
Website: cids.up.edu.ph

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About the Proceedings

These are the proceedings of The Third Regional Conference on Alternatives, “Advancing and Realizing Alternative Regionalism: Southeast Asian Peoples’ Solidarity and Resistance in COVID-19 Times,” which was held on November 11–13, 2021, via Zoom. The conference aims to highlight the efforts that the diverse peoples of Southeast Asia have advanced in fostering and promoting alternative regionalism that forms the basis of communities’ alternative practices. This three-day conference was co-organized by these organizations:

- University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Alternative Development
- University of the Philippines School of Labor and Industrial Relations (UP SOLAIR)—Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives (CLGI)
- ASEAN SOGIE Caucus
- Asian Music for Peoples’ Peace and Progress
- Asian Solidarity Economy Council
- CIVICA Research
- Focus on the Global South
- Fundasaun Hafoun Timor Loro’sae
- Homenet Southeast Asia
- Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute
- Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI, Confederation of Indonesian People’s Movements)
- Milk Tea Alliance
- Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP) Pasundan Federation of Farmers)
- Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning

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- Vietnam Peace and Development Foundation
- 11.11.11 Coalition of the Flemish North-South Movement

The communities in these areas also participated in this conference:

- West Java or Pasundan (SPP members in Garut, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, Pangandaran), Indonesia
- Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- Ermera, Timor-Leste
- Mae Sot, Thailand
- Quezon City, Philippines

Secretariat

- 1.) Eduardo C. Tadem, PhD
- 2.) Benjamin B. Velasco
- 3.) Ananeza P. Aban
- 4.) Jose Monfred C. Sy
- 5.) Rafael Vicente V. Dimalanta
- 6.) Ryan Joseph Martinez
- 7.) Micah Hanah S. Orlino
- 8.) Honey B. Tabiola

Documenters

- 1.) Jheimeel P. Valencia
- 2.) Hannah Giorgia Magtoto
- 3.) Lucky E. Dela Rosa
- 4.) Ryan Cezar O. Alcarde
- 5.) Janine Lopez
- 6.) Samantha David

Writers

- 1.) Hannah Giorgia Magtoto
- 2.) Jheimeel P. Valencia

FIRST DAY

11 November 2021

Opening Remarks

Ms. Raquel Castillo

Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL), Philippines

Welcome to the Third Southeast Asia Conference on Alternatives with the theme, “Advancing and Realizing Alternative Regionalism: Southeast Asian Peoples’ Solidarity and Resistance in COVID-19 Times,” the first virtual conference ever!

Towards a people-centered, people-led post-COVID-19 Southeast Asia, we, the diverse peoples from across the region and beyond, are gathered now to advance and realize a different regionalism rooted in the alternative practices and experiences of communities from below. A regional movement that is hoped to carry on the vision will discuss and plan strategic direction, drawing on the lessons from one another and from the global alternatives movements.

This three-day conference is co-organized by the following organizations:

- University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Alternative Development

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- University of the Philippines School of Labor and Industrial Relations (UP SOLAIR)—Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives (CLGI)
- ASEAN SOGIE Caucus
- Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress
- Asian Solidarity Economy Council
- CIVICA Research
- Focus on the Global South
- Fundasaun Hafoun Timor Loro'sae
- Homenet Southeast Asia
- Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute
- Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI, Confederation of Indonesian People's Movements)
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- Ermera, Timor-Leste
- Mae Sot, Thailand
- Quezon City, Philippines

Performance

"A Village in the Making"

Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress (aMP3)
 composed by Jess Santiago

*There's a village in the making
 For the hungry and oppressed
 For the helpless and the dying
 The uncared-for and unbled
 It's for those whose lives are battered
 But who keep on living on
 It's for those whose dreams are shattered
 But who keep on dreaming on*

*There's a village in the making
 For the silent and the silenced
 The unlettered and the nameless
 The disabled and displaced
 One may speak in ones and zeroes
 Or in signs and muted calls
 Yet the language of the heart
 Is the mother tongue of all*

*There's a village in the making
 A community of friends
 Who refuse to yield their hope
 to the sirens of despair
 There's a village in the making
 It's no dungeon in the air
 Come together and in friendship
 Build this village of our dreams*

*There's a village in the making
 For humanity in pain
 Where the sun is source of healing
 And no acid stains the rain
 It's the home for all the homeless*

*The forsaken and forlorn
It's for people of all ages
And the children yet unborn*

*There's a village in the making
From the ruins of our greed
It's for people of all color
Of all gender and all creed
For the flora and the fauna
And the future of us all
For the child that dwells in each of us
And the friend we have in all.*

Dream on...

The Facebook Livestream at the official page of Lawan may be viewed at: <https://web.facebook.com/100069832179831/videos/1048426135977619>, at time stamp: 7:37 – 16:51.

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Ma. Cynthia Banzon-Bautista

*Vice President for Academic Affairs
University of the Philippines System*

Dr. Ma. Cynthia Banzon-Bautista recalls the relevance of the theme of the Third Regional Conference on Alternatives, “Advancing and Realizing Alternative Regionalism: Southeast Asian Peoples’ Solidarity, and Resistance in COVID-19 Times.” She links it to how the 2020 conference highlighted the role that peoples’ movements play in fostering an alternative model of regionalism. In establishing alternative regionalism, Cynthia notes the importance of participation in the context of sustaining peoples’ movements.

[I]ntensified participation can effectively generate multiple localized actions, enhance multiple pathways to development when the community of development workers in the conference recognize a latent function in the

United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in highlighting the roles of localized initiatives in bringing out of obscurity numerous marginalized people-centered practices, to give them more space and a louder voice in the development discourse.

Cynthia recognizes how many participants in the 2020 and 2021 conferences “are members of a larger community of alternative society builders” who have presented a critique of the UN SDGs in terms of the conditions in which they operate. They have criticized how the SDGs do not give enough attention to increasing social inequality. Many networks of universities in the Asia-Pacific region have also raised this critique.

Cynthia also notes how the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how social inequality has exposed the limits of capitalism in Southeast Asia. The responses of governments in Southeast Asian countries have been considered inadequate, including the “weak and substandard public healthcare systems, increasing healthcare privatization, and the absence of universal social protection for poor and marginalized communities.” This kind of pandemic response has been exacerbated by the emerging COVID-19 vaccine apartheid, which reflects existing social inequalities between rich and poor countries. That in turn is reinforced by the political atmosphere in nations and the involvement of big pharmaceutical companies. Authoritarian regimes have also weaponized the coronavirus pandemic to make democratic spaces smaller, consolidate their power over citizens, and crack down on the opposition. These things happen in the middle of the exponential rise of COVID-19 cases, long lockdowns, and economic crises in many countries, and their impact is felt by marginalized sectors of society. Nevertheless, these crises have become opportunities for communities “to demonstrate their cross-border solidarity, resistance, and collective action through their alternative practices on the ground.” Grassroots communities in Southeast Asia have paved their way toward an “alternative mode of regional integration” founded on the “solidarity, social cohesion, mutual benefit, and the commons principle.”

The Third Regional Conference on Alternatives responds to the “crises and opportunities” that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic. It advocates for a post-COVID-19 Southeast Asia that is led by the people and centers on their concerns. In this conference, different communities and sectors within and beyond Southeast Asia are gathered “to advance and realize an alternative regionalism rooted in the alternative practices and experiences of our peoples.” The conference aims to lay down the foundations of a Southeast Asian regional movement that highlights the peoples’ alternative regional integration in contrast to “elite-centered” and “market-driven” regionalism. The conference on Alternatives, with the theme, “Advancing and Realizing Alternative Regionalism: Southeast Asian Peoples’ Solidarity, and Resistance in COVID-19 Times,” has these objectives:

- To highlight peoples’ alternative practices that withstood, developed amidst, and critically responded to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- To harness and consolidate people-to-people and cross-border solidarity through diverse platforms and engagement;
- To strengthen networks and explore new linkages toward a global alternatives movement, and;
- To identify concrete steps and action points towards a regional movement of alternatives.

Cynthia makes references to Erik Olin Wright’s concept of “real utopias,” which refers to “alternatives to mainstream development that cynical pragmatists have dismissed as ‘mere fantasies.’” These “alternative visions” may not have a realistic outcome or may be bound to fail. Yet Wright notes that as people envision a “just and humane society,” it is important to reconcile these visions with “practical realities,” and ground these “dreams, initiatives, and experiments” on what people actually experience. The concept of “real utopias,” according to Cynthia, may help grassroots organizations that pursue an alternative mode of regionalism in Southeast Asia. For her, the initiatives of these organizations “substantiate the concept of ‘real utopias.’”

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Advancing and Realizing a Southeast Asian People's Alternative Regionalism

Dr. Eduardo Tadem

Convenor

University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies Program on Alternative Development

Dr. Eduardo Tadem's keynote address builds on the theme of the Third Regional Conference on Alternatives, "Advancing and Realizing a Southeast Asian Peoples' Alternative Regionalism." Ed presents a critique of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), highlighting how it has failed to "meaningfully address issues and concerns" of Southeast Asian peoples. As a "negative model of regional integration," the ASEAN model thereof is controlled by national and regional elites. In this context, the elites are constituted by political oligarchs, big corporations, and other elements that exercise power. The strategies pursued by ASEAN countries have exacerbated social inequality and destroyed the environment.

Ed points out the importance of looking for alternatives to the ASEAN model of regional integration. For him, that model is "based on cutthroat competition, the insatiable thirst for profits, and a national perspective" that is framed by "an ultrapatriotic and chauvinist attitude." The alternative should be based on the practices that communities and sectors in Southeast Asian countries have been practicing for decades. These alternative ways cover economic, political, social, and cultural aspects, and they facilitate the formation of new social relationships. These alternatives, according to Ed, "are guided by the principles of solidarity, cooperation, mutual benefit, the commons, and joint development." Guided by traditions that have been established, improved, and sustained across generations, these alternative practices help in the establishment of a humane and just society. However,

there are challenges in sustaining these alternative practices, which are “spatially dispersed” and are scattered across different localities. Therefore, it is important to link these practices throughout Southeast Asia in forming this alternative people’s regional network.

The 2020 ASEAN Peoples’ Forum, held in Hanoi, Vietnam, left a positive development in alternative regional integration. The “Resolution on Alternative Regional Integration for Southeast Asian Peoples,” which had been in the works since 2017, was approved in 2020 by participants from civil society organizations in Southeast Asia. The signatories resolved that:

- “In order to overcome and address the frustration and disappointment at the results of the 13-year engagement with the official ASEAN process, the APF shall develop and adopt ‘a new vision for engagement by civil society’ with ASEAN ‘based on people-to-people interactions rather than state-to-state relations or purely market-oriented interactions.’”(Tadem 2017)
- “To lead the way forward to greater participation by Southeast Asian peoples in cross-border interactions and undertakings, this new vision shall lead to the establishment of a new peoples’ regional integration process.”
- “As a preliminary starting point, the new Southeast Asian peoples’ regional integration process shall be based on, among others, the alternative practices of peoples, networks, and organizations across the region’s societies.”

Ed makes references to Steven Klees and presents points of critique of the neoliberal and neoclassical models of development that have been applied in ASEAN countries. He pointed out that they have failed because they try to “separate the issues of equity and distribution from that of efficiency.” The assumption that competition based on profit leads to a “more efficient” economy is also flawed because it ends up focusing on maintaining the concentration of wealth and resources among the rich and the elite while keeping billions poor. In addition, existing “alternative heterodox theories” have been insufficient in addressing debates among various theories. He advises to “pay more

attention to the many alternative practices” in play. Ed’s presentation enumerated the examples of alternative practices:

Economic alternative practices

- Production side: production cooperatives and communities, social enterprises, and solidarity economy-based initiatives
- Food production and distribution: alternative trade, organic family farms, agroecology, “biodiversity, zero-waste production, and indigenous agronomic practices“ (e.g., plant breeding) (Tadem 2017)
- Power generation: community-based renewable sources (solar, wind, biogas, etc.)
- Marketing side: direct producer-consumer linkages, the revival of local markets, and fair trade and mutual exchange

Political alternative practices

- Networks of civil society organizations (CSOs), social movements, and people’s organizations (POs)
- Joint political advocacies and actions through mass mobilizations
- Alternatives to traditional political parties
- Direct action by deprived communities
- Integrated socioeconomic planning
- Traditional conflict-settlement mechanisms
- Use of social media

Social alternative practices

- Self-help groups for social production
- Community-based healthcare systems under primary care principles
- “Barefoot” health practitioners
- Use of organic and generic healing practices

- Alternative learning: folk schools, nonformal centers, and lifelong-learning advocacies
- Alternative housing: people-oriented and directed shelter programs, and vernacular architecture

Cultural alternative practices

- Networks of visual artists and other performers that “showcase the richness, diversity, and historical depth of Southeast Asia’s creative arts” (Tadem 2017)
- Cultural practices that highlight significant political, social, and economic issues of marginalized sectors of society
- Cultural practices lend “a human and spiritual face to political and economic dimensions” (Tadem 2017).

There have been 60 cases of alternative practices that have been published and made available via the UP CIDS’s website:

Access to justice

- A holistic approach to handling migrant cases (Philippines)
- Paralegal training for vulnerable sectors as a peace initiative (Pattani, Southern Thailand)
- Fisherfolk vs. Pak Mun Dam (Northeastern Thailand)
- Women-led Land Struggles (Bukidnon, Philippines)
- For Humanity, Infinity & Justice (Serikat Petani Pasundan, Indonesia)
- Engagement with the Government Budget Process (Social Watch Philippines)
- Workers organizing in special economic zones (Cavite, Philippines)

Gender justice and governance

- Women Organizing for Governance (Indigenous Ayta) (Philippines)

- Empowering Women-Headed Households (Indonesia)
- Peace House Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence (Vietnam)
- LGBTIQ and the Fight for Gender Equality (Timor Leste)
- Strengthening LGBTQ Communities (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus)
- Women empowerment (Thandaunggyi, Burma/Myanmar)

Alternative education

- Education from the academe to a movement for caring spaces (Philippines)
- Rural internship training program (Sarawak, Malaysia)
- Education for sustainable development (Laos)
- Lifelong Learning (Philippines)
- Lumad Bakwit School (Philippines)

Solidarity economy and other alternative economies

- Building a People's Economy (FDC, Philippines)
- Food sovereignty and agricultural production (Laos)
- Alternative trade and people's solidarity economy (Burma/Myanmar)
- Trimona multipurpose cooperative (Metro Manila, Philippines)
- Sustainable economy from the local level (Indonesia)
- Collective enterprise as a workplace (Isabela, Philippines)
- Alternative trade and social enterprise (HOMENET SEAsia)
- Collective Action for Achieving a Full Life (Bulacan, Philippines)
- Renewed change and rise of Gaya-gaya sewers (Bulacan, Philippines)
- Worker-owned, worker-managed enterprises (Negros, Philippines)
- Community pantry experiences (Philippines)

Alternative health care

- Healing at the border (Mae Tao Clinic, Thailand-Burma)
- Health in the hands of the indigenous Dumagats (Philippines)
- Community Health Watch (Bulacan, Philippines)

Right to housing and social protection

- Bamboo housing as pathways to alternative living (Philippines)
- Antidemolition campaign and land acquisition for urban poor (Metro Manila, Philippines)
- Informal sector living in a danger zone (Philippines)
- Housing and social protection (Thailand)

Alternative framework

- Social protection as a human and democratic response to crises (Southeast Asia)
- Reviving agriculture (Los Baños, Philippines)
- Workers' Information Center (Cambodia)
- Karen Development Network (Burma/Myanmar)
- Social Development (Social Watch Philippines)

There have been efforts to travel across Southeast Asia and examine how marginalized peoples have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. These countries include Thailand, Timor-Leste, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Thailand–Burma border, Laos, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia. There have also been region-wide initiatives. These responses and initiatives have been documented and published in the middle of the pandemic.

Ed mentions that there are challenges in upscaling alternative practices in building a new regional network: (1) most of these alternative practices have a narrow scope, focusing on a “narrow section of society;” (2) these alternative practices tend to be “largely disparate and disconnected;” (3) there is an increased need to research

and document these practices; and (4) it is important to understand the significance of these practices and their contributions to developing new theories and frameworks for alternative regionalism.

Ed mentions several steps that would be important in fostering an alternative peoples' regionalism:

- 1.) Researching and documenting the practices and building a database (this has been done for around 60 practices)
- 2.) Coordinating the interactions between these alternative practices
- 3.) Convening and organizing conferences and workshops of the groups and communities involved in alternative practices (these tasks were done through two large Southeast Asian regional conferences in 2018 and 2019 and an online conference in 2021)
- 4.) Conducting alternative learning and training programs based on grassroots needs
- 5.) Mobilizing the communities, practitioners, and advocates of alternative practices to undertake regional interactions through joint solidarity actions and initiatives (mobilization efforts were done especially during the pandemic, as were supporting initiatives for democracy in Burma and Thailand, and also in other countries in Southeast Asia)
- 6.) Promoting the replication of alternative practices in order to scale them and make them more mainstream
- 7.) Developing in the future a model of regional integration that is based on the interactions and cooperative practices between these alternative practices in the future
- 8.) Creating alternative regional structures that are decentralized and creative where different tasks and responsibilities are distributed throughout the region, and

- 9.) Conceptualizing and making sense of the practices and developing new paradigms and strategies of development.³

Some of these plans have been accomplished, while others are still in progress. Ed considers the agenda for an alternative peoples' regional integration as a "pioneering effort." This takes off from how the ASEAN Civil Society Conference and the ASEAN Peoples' Forum have been fostering an "alternative peoples' regionalism" for 12 years. Since the ACSC-APF conference held in the Philippines in 2005, there has been a call for such a regionalism. However, it took a long time before people decided to talk about this advocacy, develop a vision, and formulate strategies. Ed hopes that members of civil society organizations and peoples' movements based in Southeast Asia contribute to the process of making alternative peoples' regionalism a reality. To move beyond merely engaging with states and state-led authorities, organizations have to make their efforts and rarely on the "collective wisdom and the resilience of our peoples." For Ed, the new Southeast Asian peoples' movement shall be founded based on "the principles of solidarity, cooperation, mutual benefit, and the commons; the judicious and responsible use of human and natural resources; and lastly, [a] peaceful and harmonious relationship with other peoples and with nature." This is envisioned as a model that peoples and societies all around the world will utilize in the future.

References

- Tadem, Eduardo. 2017. "New Perspectives on Civil Society Engagement with ASEAN." Heinrich Böll Stiftung (The Green Political Foundation), August 2, 2017. <https://www.boell.de/en/2017/08/02/new-perspectives-civil-society-engagement-asean>

3 This list is taken virtually verbatim, with some modifications and rephrasings, from Eduardo Tadem's essay published in Heinrich Boll Stiftung Southeast Asia (2017, 31).

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Building an Inclusive, People-Centered Regionalism

Dr. Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo

Homenetphil-HNSEA

Dr. Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo presents her insights on building an inclusive and people-centered regionalism through her experience in Homenet Philippines, an organization that is a part of Homenet Southeast Asia, which in turn binds together home-based and informal workers in six countries. For Rosalinda, this conference was held (1) “to highlight peoples’ alternatives and their critical responses to the COVID-19 situation” and (2) “to identify concrete steps and action points towards building, regionally and globally, movements of alternatives that are inclusive and people-centered.” Rosalinda aims to present a framework that ensures that no one is “left behind.”

Rosalinda mentions that are several challenges that affect the lives of people. These include hunger, COVID-19 and enduring health and economic crises, unemployment/underemployment connected to unpaid care work, democratic deficit/extreme inequality, widening digital divides, climate change, and “the existential challenge.”

People’s responses/initiatives

Despite lingering crises, many sectors have engaged in solidarity-based actions for relief and recovery. To address food and environmental concerns, Homenet Philippines has been active in community-supported organic agriculture (CSOA). Thus, the organization has established community gardens, pantries, and kitchens. Homenet Southeast Asia has also sought to revive indigenous savings and lending schemes through the creation of savings and loan associations for livelihood recovery. Homenet has also recognized the need to “bridge the digital divide,” especially at a time when everyone is under lockdown, and the

internet is the only means available for education, communication, and microenterprises' marketing.

From the 1970s up to the 1990s, informal workers have been advocating for social protection. Rosalinda presented posters that present messages on the importance of “saving lives and livelihoods toward social protection for all.” Informal workers tend to have little social protection coverage because of poverty or nonindigency. Because informal workers are not part of the formal economy, in which employers and employees have an equitable share in contribution-based social security and health insurance programs, Homenet has since been advocating for inclusion in such schemes. Homenet has also been part of the Asian Roundtable on Social Protection (AROS), and it has raised universal and inclusive social protection for all, especially for disadvantaged groups, in the context of COVID-19. This proposal has to be financed through taxes, recognizing that the state has the principal duty to provide citizens as claim-holders the protection benefits that ought to be provided in the middle of emergencies. These include universal healthcare, housing, and livelihood, among others.

Intersectionality

Rosalinda highlights the relevance of ensuring proper treatment of informal economy workers. She echoes the message “Treat domestic workers like humans,” saying that it remains relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many domestic workers have lost their jobs because of the fear that they would “infect their employers” during the pandemic. For Rosalinda, the case of domestic workers shows the intersection of concerns related to gender, employment status, and social class. Domestic workers are mostly women who participate in the informal economy and suffer from poverty.

To present another case of how intersectionality works, Rosalinda also raises the point that LGBTQIA+ have long clamored for recognition and protection within ASEAN and the countries where they have been suffering from discrimination. The case of the LGBTQIA+ community in Southeast Asia demonstrates the importance of recognizing the intersections between sexuality and gender, class, ethnicity, physical

abilities, and age, to assess how people experience discrimination and marginalization.

Including the excluded: Mobilizing domestic workers

Rosalinda calls to “include the excluded” in recognizing intersections. It is important to mobilize domestic workers so that they can reclaim their rights. Efforts to do so have been happening in different countries through the formation of an international domestic workers’ federation and an International Labor Organization (ILO) convention that recognizes the rights of domestic workers. Both initiatives ensure that they are not treated like slaves.

The chapters of Homenet in different countries in Southeast Asia organized domestic workers who migrants whose rights are not recognized due to their being nonresidents of urban communities (e.g., Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam). In Vietnam, Mnet, the Homenet chapter in that country, facilitated advocacy work, conducted workshops and social dialogues, and provided social assistance through cash transfer packages: all for migrant informal workers who were affected by COVID-19. In Cambodia, Homenet conducted digital training for microentrepreneurs who had lost their usual markets due to the pandemic. Homenet conducted digital training in using Facebook and Messenger to sell products. Participants in these training programs include persons with disabilities, especially survivors of human trafficking and victims of landmine explosions during the war in Cambodia.

Rosalinda also calls for engaging the state and creating spaces. She cites the example of Thai informal workers. Seven hundred of them marched to the Ministry of Labor to call for livelihood assistance, cash benefits, and recovery packages for informal workers. In response, Thai informal workers were included in the Social Security Law and now enjoy the benefits of a Home-based Workers’ Act. In addition, workers were able to push the government to pass universal healthcare, which has become beneficial for everyone. This is also a recognition of ASEAN’s push towards including universal healthcare as part of the framework of the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration for Strengthening Social Protection.

The question we all need to think about

Rosalinda presents a question that participants in the conference ought to think about: “What concrete steps can we make; what action points can we pursue towards building regional and possibly global movement/s of alternatives?” Rosalinda says, “We believe that we need to build on the basics.” These include organizing, awareness-raising, and capacity-building—all of which are “nonnegotiable.” Furthermore, Rosalinda emphasizes the need to sustain relationships and friendships to foster “mutual trust and cooperation,” as well as sharing resources and knowledge to establish common projects and programs that can be funded. Knowledge-sharing in the form of magazines, websites, regular meetings and conferences, congresses, workshops, and webinars are also deemed important. Before the pandemic, there have been field visits, study tours, exposure dialogues, and trade fairs. And in these activities, home-based workers and leaders from different countries became acquainted with each other. In addition, there have been virtual visits to country members in Homenet Southeast Asia. Through digital hubs, leaders and members can use their smartphones and laptops so that they become aware of what is going on in the world. This is an example of how digital technology is effectively used. She concludes by emphasizing the significance of fostering solidarity. “In solidarity, we are strong, and together we shall overcome.” She also wishes good luck to the solidarity efforts that will be established in the “desirable” future for the peoples of Southeast Asia and of humanity and the planet.

GUEST SPEAKER'S TALK

Dr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram

*Visiting Senior Fellow at Khazanah Research Institute in Malaysia
Visiting Fellow at the Initiative for Policy Dialogue, Columbia University*

Dr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram's talk primarily focuses on the COVID-19 situation, government policies related to the pandemic, and insights into peoples' movements. Jomo notes that 2021 happens to be the 500th anniversary of Ferdinand Magellan's arrival in Mactan, an island in the central Philippines, as well as his death under Lapu-Lapu's organized resistance. Magellan threatened two villages into accepting Christianity, becoming subject to the King of Spain, and paying tributes. However, the third village, which was under the leadership of Lapu-Lapu, resisted, ambushing Magellan's group and killing him while sparing people in the group. For Jomo, Lapulapu's victory is significant for being "the first successful act of resistance to colonialism." This ought to be an inspiration for the peoples of Southeast Asia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought crises and opportunities for many countries. For instance, the pandemic has accelerated digitalization, especially in the emergence of new means of communication. Jomo posits that since these methods of communication would still be used even after the pandemic, peoples' movements should take advantage of them to build on their causes. Jomo cites the example of how social media have mobilized people in Korea and in Southeast Asia. However, such media have a double-edged character. For instance, fake news and disinformation regarding the pandemic continue to proliferate, misleading people who end up resisting vaccines and mask mandates. They would think that they are already "safe" and that these health protocols are "an infringement on people's liberties." Jomo, however, cautions that looking at rights at an individual level instead of a collective level could be "very antisocial." Peoples' movements need to highlight the need to look at rights collectively because "it is the people which matter, not the individual."

Jomo then proceeds with a critique of capitalism and corporate control during the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses and corporate control have been affected by the health crises; however, some rich people continue to generate income while others remain in need. The pandemic made social inequality more evident; for instance, three of the richest billionaires in the world have been in space while many people in the world do not have access to vaccines. Jomo notes that while the COVID-19 crises have been felt differently by different sectors, there are still opportunities that peoples' movements have to consider.

The "corporate capture" of public health has been occurring for decades, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, this phenomenon continues to have an impact on society. Since public health has been considered a "very profitable business," there has been little public spending on public health to the point that it does not adequately address the needs of people. The data show how little is spent on public healthcare. First, people in higher socioeconomic strata tend to pay more because of the failure of the public health system, and many people continue to lack resources. As such, the poor continue to have inadequate access to public health services. To address this issue, one of the demands is to increase spending on such services.

Jomo mentions that governments in Southeast Asia have expressed their commitment to providing universal healthcare as part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. They should be held accountable to keep their promises. Jomo says, "They cannot talk about universal healthcare or health for all if they ignore the commitments and responsibilities to the public." In addition, it is more efficient to guarantee healthcare spending as part of public policy. For instance, Dr. Adam Wagstaff demonstrated that dedicating public funds for health is much more efficient than the "social insurance-level cost" of for-profit private insurance policies. In other words, public spending on healthcare is better than relying on private insurance systems. However, in publicly funding healthcare, it is important to prioritize preventative medicine over curative medicine, since the health sector in contemporary times has been spending more on cures rather than ways to prevent diseases, which had been done up to the colonial period in countries.

Jomo then proceeds with problems that countries have been experiencing during the pandemic. In poor countries, COVID-19 testing kits, which have been handled primarily by private entities around the world, are expensive. In addition, personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline workers has also been privately supplied and are expensive. Prices of COVID-19 treatments have also been set high, and they have also been misleadingly advertised as cheap due to fake news. As such, misinformation has led people to contract the disease itself. Another significant problem that affects poor countries is the delay in enacting a resolution that waives patents and intellectual property rights for the manufacturing of COVID-19 treatments, including vaccines. This resolution was proposed by South Africa and India and was sent to the World Trade Organization (WTO); however, rich countries have been delaying the resolution for a year.

In addition, middle-income countries have not been adequately supporting developing countries in demanding this waiver. This waiver is important for developing countries, as it will enable them to produce testing kits and treatments, among others. Developing tests and treatments has proven to be important, especially during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa in the 1990s during Nelson Mandela's presidency. At that time, the existing treatments were expensive because they were made by private companies. Jomo also recounts the Doha Development Round, a trade-negotiation round convened by the WTO, saying that "nothing is happening." Roberto Azevêdo, the Director-General of the WTO from Brazil from 2013 to 2021, resigned amid the COVID-19 pandemic because he "had failed," but Jomo argued that "the main reason he had failed was basically sabotage by the rich countries of the world, who are not interested in the Development Round."

Jomo then proceeds to a discussion on vaccines. Different kinds of vaccines have been developed to prevent severe COVID-19, including "chemical" messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines, such as Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and "biological" dead viral material vaccines. The latter include the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, China's Sinovac and Sinopharm, Russian-based Gamaleya Institute's Sputnik vaccines, and Cuba's two vaccines (with a third one pending approval). Jomo argues, however, that these vaccines do not provide 100% protection from the disease, unlike vaccines that have been developed for polio, tuberculosis,

and smallpox. With the emergence of COVID-19 variants affecting the reliability of the COVID-19 vaccines, Jomo points out that the solidarity of developing countries in the Global South is important, and this has been challenged since the end of the Cold War in 1991.

Jomo discusses “physical space” amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The question of “physical space” becomes relevant in the context of trade liberalization, a practice that many countries engage in. Under trade liberalization, governments cannot tax imports and exports. As a consequence, trade liberalization has caused the decline of local goods and overall tax collection, especially among poor countries. Many countries have been unable to collect customs taxes, and they lack the physical means and the budget to spend in response to crises. These budgetary constraints are further exacerbated by the fear of being deemed “not market-friendly,” reflecting that markets show how the richest people in countries and in the world exert influence over government policies. During the Asian financial crisis in 1997–98, countries in Southeast Asia adopted measures that countries in the West would apply during the 2008 global financial crisis.

Jomo presents resolutions that would be beneficial to peoples’ movements. One is the importance of improving nutrition because it is cheaper. To satisfy the nutritional needs of children, peoples’ movements can consider organizing school feeding programs that are connected to farmers’ movements. Jomo recognizes that the current crisis has challenged existing prevailing beliefs regarding food security, and it is now possible to mobilize through these programs. In addition, these programs can help address nutritional issues, including micronutrient deficiency, the need for vitamins and minerals, and food-related noncommunicable diseases. Jomo also points out that people have to be creative in engaging with their governments, as with the case during Suharto’s dictatorship in Indonesia. In addition, Jomo calls for the accountability of governments and of ASEAN, calling the organization to adhere to the 1967 and 1974 Principles that focus on “ensuring that ASEAN remains a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality” in light of countries expressing interest on Southeast Asia (for instance, the United Kingdom sent aircraft carriers to the South China Sea). Despite the emerging “cold war” between the United States and China, Jomo calls for ASEAN to “stay neutral” and “stay nuclear-free.”

OPEN FORUM

Ryan Silverio (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus): What does solidarity mean in terms of vaccines? How can we operationalize solidarity?

Jomo: Very simply, I think the easiest thing to say is [that] ASEAN, as a whole, and this is not the case right now, should be forced to completely support the proposal by South Africa and India for a waiver on intellectual property rights. In addition, there are a lot of capacities in Southeast Asia to produce vaccines, to produce PPE, to produce tests and treatments, and these should be made available not only within Southeast Asia but also beyond basically across [those] places. And this has to be accelerated throughout the region and throughout the world. Similarly, there should be some solidarity with others. For instance, the largest vaccine manufacturer in India produces hundreds of millions of vaccines every year. And there are vaccine production facilities for mRNA vaccines in South Africa, Brazil, and a number of countries, including those in Southeast Asia. All this should be mobilized to ensure their availability of vaccines in the requisite [sic] numbers. And a kind of discrimination is being practiced by Western countries in terms of not accepting vaccines other than Western ones; they do not accept those manufactured abroad. For example, the Oxford vaccine, produced for a brief time by the Serum Institute of India, was not good enough to enter Europe. So, you know this kind of discrimination has been taking place and so on. But I think the other thing, of course, is to enable many of the poorest countries in the world, which have not even signed up for COVAX because basically, they cannot afford it. And the Delta variant basically happened because, you know, there were not enough people in India who were protected against the disease. So, we have to protect everybody in the world. And I think the pressure should be there, and we should put outside some of our differences for this focus.

Ed: [I hope that I've shared or whatever] you have written in your speech, and it will be good to have [it] shared, but if not, we can always transcribe it later. But now, to directly answer the question about solidarity in our procured vaccines, I would just like to note that the Philippines has been producing vaccines for various diseases since the 1930s when we were still under American colonial power. There was a special unit that was created to produce vaccines for common ailments like diphtheria, typhoid, measles, and all that. But after the war, after we became independent, we suddenly stopped producing vaccines, I don't know why, but the unit that was created to produce vaccines is still existing, I think; it has not been abolished. But I can imagine it's not being given enough funding or attention or even personnel in order to pursue its goal of producing more vaccines. That really is the problem.

Joseph Purugganan (Focus on the Global South): One of the biggest challenges for the assertion of peoples' sovereignty is corporate power and the corporate capture of governance. What can broad peoples' movements do to push back the power of corporations?

Ed: The most logical response to Joseph's question is to counterpose the owners of capital, the owners of the business corporations, [with] the power of the working class, the workers themselves who are working for these big business corporations. [They must be] better organized, more militant, and more active in order to counter the power of corporations. The bigger the corporations, the more insidious and destructive they become. We refer specifically to billionaires who run corporations. Bernie Sanders said that billionaires do not have the right to exist. They should not exist. And the bigger the corporation, the less right it has to exist. So, I would say, therefore, that power that can counter the corporations is workers' power. Get them to be more militant and organized. One of the presidential candidates for the next elections in May 2022 is a socialist. His platform emphasizes the principle of workers' control. If fortunate enough to be elected, or at least to make an impact on the electoral process, he proposes that workers be given the power to make decisions as a preliminary step. They should be given the power to [also] make corporate decisions, not just the owners of capital.

Rosalinda: Regarding resisting corporate power, we should build a broader front with workers at the forefront but also harness the forces of environmental and human rights defenders amongst indigenous peoples, as well as workers in the informal economy, not just trade unions. Also to be included are women's rights organizations working on digital issues connected to the domination of big tech, as well as organized health workers, who are proposing alternatives in addressing COVID-19, and can confront big pharma. We need to build bridges across people's movements working for transformative change at all levels—nationally, regionally, and even globally.

Ralph Frondoza: Thank you for the thought-provoking insights from all our speakers. First, how influential is the concept of “alternative regionalism” to regional or domestic policies in Southeast Asia? In light of state-centered actions by the government, for example, how they're doing the vaccine distribution amidst the pandemic, how is this sustainable? How is this state-centered way of doing it sustainable vis-à-vis our concept of resolving issues in Southeast Asia?

Jomo: I think, if I may, and I leave that to Ed Tadem. In my presentation earlier, because I was rushing, there was a very important point on which we may have not been clear enough. There was a big difference between the response of East Asia to the financial crisis in the '97-'98, and that of East Asia during the last two years. Now many of us in Southeast Asia do not realize it. Not only Japan and Korea and Taiwan and China itself outside of Wuhan but also Vietnam, Laos, even Thailand to some extent, have responded to the crisis very, very differently to COVID-19. They have not simply staged stay-in-shelter lockdowns imposed on all people, as has been the case in Malaysia and in some other parts of Southeast Asia. We have seen that even with full vaccination in countries like Singapore, we have seen a resurgence of cases. This is also happening in Israel and in many other countries. So, let us not put all our eggs in the vaccination basket. Vaccination is important; it reduces infectiousness, it reduces the likelihood of people dying, but let us not think that that is the only way. What poorer countries like Vietnam and Laos have done is to test, quickly identify, and

isolate cases. And by doing so, they were able to keep cases much lower than in other countries in Southeast Asia. So, I think we have to be humble and be willing to learn from each other even though nobody talks about it at the ASEAN level or anything about that. We have to recognize that even in the poor states like Kerala in southwest India, they were able to keep the cases down. And there has been a lot of fake news claiming that so-and-so drug basically prevented high infections in other countries and other states and so on. So I think peoples' movements have a responsibility to seek truth from facts as disinformation becomes available. Unfortunately, this whole situation is very, very complex—we are all learning as we go along almost every week, I learn something significantly new, and this is likely to continue some time for now. I think we have to recognize, not only to ourselves but to one another, to learn together as we go along. Thank you.

Ed: A colleague of mine, the late Prof. Aileen Baviera, once said that it is foolish—extremely, it is folly (actually, she used the word *folly*) for any one country to say that they can own or control the seas because the seas cannot be owned nor controlled by any one country, much less any one individual because the seas are there for all. It is as the United Nations Conference [Convention] on the Law of the Sea pointed out, seas are the common heritage of mankind. Therefore, its resources must be shared by all countries. No one country can say, “Only this part of the sea that is within my boundary, and all of their resources, they are only mine.” It cannot be shared by anyone else. And that is a very chauvinistic, I would say “ultrapatriotic,” position to take. It will only lead to more conflicts for the resources of the sea. These resources cannot be owned by any one country because the fishes move all over the place. You cannot put them in only one place. Even the oil and the water of the sea also move along the bottom of the sea. The other resources, the mineral resources—that’s the same. So, this condition of the seas and its resources is really the best argument for regionalism—of shared commons, of joint development, joint exploration by all countries who are now fighting over, for example, the South China Sea, and the shoals and the rocks that are there, that are not even islands. But then, alternative

regionalism has been based on shared resources, the commons, and not just any one country asserting its control over the entire sea like some countries are doing now in the South China Sea.

The second question also is that any state-centered initiative in resolving Southeast Asian issues—there have been many conflicts—will always fail, is bound to fail. Because what is needed, if it is a regional issue, if it's a regional conflict, it entails cooperation. It means sitting down, negotiating, bilaterally or multilaterally, to resolve such issues. But states by themselves have been found to be powerless and inefficient in resolving regional issues. It needs the participation of the peoples of the region—the peoples of Southeast Asia through their organizations, civil society, peoples' movements, peoples' organizations, and communities who are involved in a particular conflict. They must also be part of the process of arriving at solutions. These issues cannot be left to states alone, and they also definitely cannot be left to corporations alone. But sadly, in the case of the ASEAN, that is how they have been trying to resolve issues by using simply the mechanisms of the state and of corporate power, and of the market. And we have seen now that they have totally failed over so many decades.

Raquel Castillo: Thank you, Prof. Ed Tadem, for that response. And as I've said, we've really run out of time in this open forum, although of course, I see a hand raised here. Perhaps your question can be in the next panel if it is still relevant there. Let's see. There's a raised hand from Dr. Kevin Henry Villanueva, so let's see it in the second panel. And so, before we end this, I just want to inform Dr. Jomo that there are a number of people working on the ground in the grassroots that are one with you in saying that preventive healthcare is much more effective in so many different ways that they have experienced. So with that, we are closing. Thank you so much for all the inputs, insights shared by our speakers, and also all these substantive questions that have been put forward in the discussion. With this, we move on to a sort of—also a kind of a message. In this conference, actually, we look at different forms of messages. Even artistic, musical messages, the way they are presented, are integral to all that we are discussing here. So, now,

I would like to start the second part of our session with a drag performance from Jack, an LGBTQI activist from Vietnam. Jack, we give you five minutes.

Drag Art as Cultural Alternative

Jack (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus)

Drag is both an art form and a political statement. It is a way to experiment with gender, to disrupt gender norms, to make fun of or exaggerate restrictive forms of gender expressions. Drag is subversive: it exposes the ridiculousness of how societies construct and define the gender binary. Drag, as a performance, liberates both the artist and the audience from the social confines and explores or defines the self.

Drag queens, kings, and artists are part of the LGBTIQ+ movements. Drag queens were among those who fought during the historic Stonewall riots that sparked a global movement. In Southeast Asia, drag artists not only entertain, but they also make activism visible, amplifying voices for democracy and human rights. Drag queens have joined the mass protests for democracy in Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Peoples' Responses/Strategies During the Pandemic and Other Crises: Cases of Solidarity-Based Practices Among the Peoples That Materialized Even Without Sufficient Support From Governments

Viability of Peoples' Market/Solidarity Economy

Anwar Sastro Ma'ruf

Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (Confederation of Indonesian People's Movements)

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated poverty among the working class. This health crisis emerged at a time when many people are resisting the hegemony of neoliberalism in governments. Anwar Sastro Ma'ruf discusses how social movements in Indonesia, which have drawn from the experiences of their counterparts in Southeast Asia and the world, have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also called for the abolition of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation.

To become economically empowered, especially at a time when corporations control the means of production, Sastro calls for working-class people to “build solidarity,” which should emerge not only through paperwork and press releases but also through practice. There should be solidarity between food producers and also between producers and consumers. Solidarity, according to Sastro, “must be integrative” and “cross-border,” covering issues, perspectives, sectors, and territories. In addition, solidarity must be “people-to-people.”

In the future, the solidarity economy of working-class people would operate through collective economic efforts and would be “normally cooperative.” To match corporate collusion with the state, working-class people must form national political organizations that aim to develop alternative practices, propose alternative regulations to law, and push for the ratification of alternative policies and regulations at a national

level. These alternative policies, according to Sastro, ought to include true agrarian reform and rural farm communities' industrialization, which will ensure working peoples' food sovereignty.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how the state has failed to provide social protection, access to health services, food, education, and employment, among others. Fostering an environment of corruption and the lack of solidarity with the working people, “[a]lmost all governments,” according to Sastro, have protected the interests of oligarchs and capitalists. They have engaged in embezzling social security funds, enacting antipeople adjustment policies, realigning budgets away from social services, evading taxes, and developing an environment of corruption and nepotism affecting the provision of social assistance and health services. Because of the power of the state and the influence of the global political economy, oppression and exploitation continue to happen in various states, tending to spare the rich's economic stability.

Sastro notes how measures that favor the elite have continued under the new normal. For instance, the Indonesian government has cut the budget allocated for social protection, citing “the lack of data accuracy and pervasive corruption.” This measure, in effect, reduced the number of recipients of public funds that could help insure the poor (the PBI BPJS Kesehatan). Around 9 million recipients were removed from the 96.8 million potential recipients of aid, according to the 2020 and 2022 state budgets. The government still aims to reduce the number of PBI recipients to 40 million in 2024. The Indonesian government has also slashed the budget for persons with disabilities, from 2.75 percent of the total budget in 2019 to 0.78 percent in 2020 and 0.23 percent in 2021.

The push for infrastructure development has exacerbated this crisis. This is a consequence of the implementation of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, which, according to Sastro, “promotes the deepening of capital-driven, investment-funded neoliberal development under the guise of job creation and economic development.” For Sastro, prioritizing infrastructure projects is a “waste of budget” and threatens the livelihood of working-class people. Social movements ought to monitor state budget allocation and forgo neoliberal approaches to

economic development. As such, Sastro calls on movements to advocate for “universal and comprehensive” social protection that would benefit working-class people who are bearing the brunt of the pandemic, natural disasters, crop devaluation, climate change, and crises that are caused by capitalism. In addition, social movements have to assert food sovereignty. As such, Sastro introduces the concept of a “solidarity economy,” one that considers working-class people as “brothers and sisters” in challenging corporate greed by fostering cooperation between producers and consumers and among developing countries (that are affected by the corporate takeover of food systems).

Sastro believes that social movements in Southeast Asia have been experiencing breakthroughs, and a comprehensive discussion on alternatives is important in disseminating information on how social movements and community organizations work together in fostering forms of alternative development. Alternative development, therefore, becomes part of the priorities during and even after the pandemic, and this shall benefit producers, distributors, and consumers.

Despite the notion that workers should be the “master of [their] own labor,” Sastro raises a question regarding their experiences of poverty and oppression. He calls for the implementation of the Four Economic Pillars: (1) building awareness; (2) building government; (3) building production, distribution, and consumption bases; and (4) developing cooperative and collective economic efforts. It is important to educate working-class people regarding their roles as producers and call for their inclusion in participatory research, alongside people who are engaged in production and consumption.

One of the ways to ensure the involvement of working-class people in food programs is to inculcate a lifestyle of financial management from a working-class perspective. For Sastro, it is important to ensure the organization of people in a collective and democratic manner in order to pursue their sovereignty. One of the ways to achieve this is by strengthening the production base of families and collective farming models. Solidarity comes at the forefront of family farming, in which families do not have to spend much or become merely dependent, but instead form cooperatives with other families. Sastro calls for the creation of a People’s Council for the Development of a Solidarity

Economy Manifesto, as well as a broad alliance to foster a tight-knit solidarity economy based on issues that affect people. In this process, there ought to be a democratic manner of planning for economic production and sustainable industrialization agenda. An example is the development of community-based fishing technology so that fisherfolk can process their products and create jobs in the countryside. This can be done through peoples' cooperatives. Sastro also encourages these cooperatives to consider building their own digital markets to reduce dependence on "major tech," digital middlemen, and moneylenders and to help them understand how they can market products while enforcing social distancing during the pandemic.

Sastro calls for the creation of a bank system that is managed by the working class. Sastro suggests creating credit unions that serve as a "financial institution" and an "education hub for the people's enterprise." This credit union initiative can serve as an "incubator" that would benefit producers' cooperatives and socialized collective businesses. This effort in fostering a working people's cooperative alliance and a people-to-people solidarity economy network entails meeting and including potential actors in communities and marginalized sectors such as women, persons with disabilities, unions, peoples' organizations, and nongovernment organizations, among others. Networks of cooperatives have to be established across Southeast Asia and develop links with other countries in the Global South and with Global North-based entities that express solidarity. This alliance is important in enhancing the strength of working people and challenging the dominance of multinational corporations. Sastro calls for continuing people-to-people actions by "promoting joint pilot projects," especially in knowledge-sharing and technology.

Sastro calls for an alternative formulation committee at all levels of government. This committee aims to formulate alternative policies and regulations that working peoples' movements would use to lobby, campaign, and act to advance food sovereignty, protect workers' cooperatives, and advocate for a transformative social protection policy. This alliance also has to promote various progressive transitional programs, including universal social protection in education and health, universal basic income, workers' safety, and environmental protection.

This is a recognition of how crises continue to increase risks and precariousness due to the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization instigated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, climate change, and natural disasters. Sastro ends his talk with this call: “Solidarity economy, people-to-people, right now.”

Initiatives of Communities as Health Workers

Dr. Cynthia Maung

Presented by Tee Tar Swe

Mae Tao Clinic, Thai-Burma Border

In her talk about how health workers have created initiatives for the people of Myanmar, Dr. Cynthia Maung presents the current situation in the country. Myanmar faces humanitarian crises that are political in nature and that manifest through oppression and human rights violations affecting civilians, especially ethnic minorities. The longstanding impunity and unchecked abuses, which have been happening for decades, have led to displacement, poverty, food insecurity, and a protracted health crisis. Dr. Cynthia contextualizes her talk in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the coup d'état of the Burmese military junta, which has displaced many people and aggravated the risk for diseases.

Before the pandemic and the coup, ethnic health organizations and community-based organizations have worked together to standardize the delivery of services and quality care. In addition, these organizations have conducted capacity-building programs for health workers within the Ethnic Health System Strengthening Group Network. In addition, organizations have helped make secondary healthcare more accessible by building relationships with Myanmar's Ministry of Health and Sports. These improvements include emergency medical referrals, an “Essential Package of Immunization,” cross-border medical referrals, and a disease surveillance network with hospitals and public health offices based in Thailand.

The poor roll-out of universal healthcare in Myanmar has contributed to health inequity and poor access to healthcare facilities. In addition, Myanmar has reported high maternal mortality rates.

The State Administration Council (SAC), the military junta governing Myanmar since February 2, 2021, has been aggravating the humanitarian crisis in the country through the forced displacement and security workers among health workers, teachers, and other professionals. Military attacks on villages have exacerbated issues such as displacement and food insecurity.

As such, it is important to prioritize primary healthcare and assist with monitoring the “determinants of health.” Cynthia enumerates the priorities from ethnic and marginalized backgrounds in the context of public health emergencies:

- Maintaining essential primary health services to ensure that communities’ health centers are functioning amidst the pandemic and the coup by delivering much-needed medical supplies and responsive medical training
- Upgrading health facilities to the secondary level such as emergency obstetric care services and COVID-19 care management, and war casualty management
- Community mobilization—enhancing community volunteers’ network by increasing engagement and information-sharing and encouragement for community participation
- Ongoing regular support to healthcare professionals (EHO health workers, CDM doctors, nurses, and other health support staff) to make sure that the service providers and their families are safe so that they can continue to provide life-saving services for their communities
- Social protection for the marginalized/displaced people—a holistic approach to protection from insecurity covering health, food, and livelihood

Cynthia also acknowledges the importance of pursuing alternative ways of delivering aid, emphasizing that they should be “based on the

basic premises of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality” in light of the current situation. To deliver humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable communities in Myanmar, Cynthia encourages organizations to take advantage of operational channels, community networks, and local aid structures. These local structures have adapted their programs to meet the needs of communities with different cultures, doing so in a “culturally competent, trusted fashion.” They have helped address the impact of conflict, abuses, displacements, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Cynthia emphasizes the need for “flexibility” in these initiatives.

Cynthia calls for ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines are made accessible swiftly, prioritizing vulnerable communities affected by conflict and abuse. In Myanmar’s case, these include pursuing cross-border options, working with ethnic health organizations, and ensuring that the health of the people among Myanmar’s neighbors is protected from COVID-19 and its variants.

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, according to Cynthia, is not merely a “conflict.” It is instead a manifestation of impunity through abuses and weaponizing tools that could have been used to address the issues that affect people. The flexibility of humanitarian aid is important in “effectively, equitably, and efficiently” responding to “Myanmar’s longstanding chronic emergency.” Cynthia also urges the international community to call for the end of the Burmese military junta’s rule and stand in solidarity with the people of the country in resisting militarization and in making communities resilient.

Effectiveness of Political Protests/Strikes During the Pandemic (Emphasis on Political Alternatives)

Agustiana⁴

Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP, Pasundan Federation of Farmers)

The Pasundan Federation of Farmers (Serikat Petani Pasundan, SPP) is a movement in Indonesia that aims to protect the rights of

⁴ This part is a condensed summary of Agustiana’s talk, with Rizki Estrada serving as his interpreter.

farmers and promote ideas and initiatives in technology based on the movement's ideology and ethics. SPP was set up as a mass organization, a pioneer at a national level amidst the impact of corporate-backed government interests in this sector. The decisions that the SPP undertakes at the national level cater to the welfare of workers, farmers' organizations, and marginalized sectors and envision serving as "counterparts" of the government where SPP can focus on its own framework of governance.

The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has become a focus of the SPP, with the organization witnessing how workers have struggled because of the health crisis; some have been fired as well. As such, the organization considered the development of ideas that would be beneficial to other social movements. SPP has forged partnerships and created networks that help its members understand how COVID-19 affects their lives and how their members can address this crisis. As such, SPP has focused on ensuring health and access to social services, recognizing health concerns of people affected by the pandemic, and on considering how SPP could help them in the future. Furthermore, SPP has been considering ways to ensure that members do not get infected or reinfected by the coronavirus. SPP's work draws inspiration from activists' and human rights workers' principles of "sharing the pain" and "not repeating" acts where they have lost.

Recognizing that the government acts on profit-based interests and not on the safety and security of the people, SPP has aimed to protect its members from policies that are detrimental to workers and to ensure that they receive services. As such, SPP values the primacy of organizing, albeit through teleconferencing programs such as Zoom, as well as other virtual modes of communication to meet with members and partners.

SPP also considers the importance of providing for the vital needs of people, including food and medicines, as a way to support the organization's mission and enable people to realize that they can "take care of themselves and care for each other" and how they can "consider each other's needs." This can enable people to become self-sufficient while providing whenever they can. Regarding the COVID-19 context, SPP is also aware of the need to provide isolation facilities for people

who are infected by COVID-19, as well as mobilizing its members even when they are far from each other because of travel restrictions and social distancing protocols.

To foster solidarity among the poorest of the poor, it is important to instill a sense of collective ownership. As such, SPP considers partnering with and providing for activists and human rights defenders outside the organization. For instance, SPP has worked with *Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI)* and its affiliate trade unions, students' organizations, farmers, and social movements. In addition, SPP has provided them shelter, as well as attended to their needs. Witnessing the quality of healthcare that their workers have experienced, as well as health workers seeking help, SPP has recognized that organizations from the national to the local levels have to develop a sense of solidarity and ensure that no one is "sacrificed" for their personal interests even during a public health crisis. In addition, the weaponization of the COVID-19 pandemic by the government to realign the budget and collect money only for personal and political gain shows that it does not care for its citizens. Furthermore, governments implement policies that would favor corporations more and become detrimental to the general public.

As SPP's general secretary, Agustiana recognizes the organizations' mission to protect not only its members but also society as a whole. A COVID-19 survivor himself, Agustiana had to endure having low oxygen levels and being denied hospital services. This experience, alongside other SPP members' experiences, showed how the pandemic has led SPP to act on its own as an organization, especially in contributing to the general welfare of the community. Organizations have the responsibility to ensure that their members are safe and to organize communities and marginalized sectors through all means, including social media. Organizations have to counter the government's and corporations' neoliberal class interests. Having a sense of solidarity is important for marginalized peoples to grow and take care of each other. Social movements in Southeast Asia have valued the importance of organizing people, strengthening them, and calling out the government for its failure in meeting the needs of people.

Open Forum

Ryan Silverio (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus): We need a strong campaign towards consumers, and ensure that a solidarity economy is sustainable. Also, there is a strong cause for the government to revise [the bases of its] law, and grant incentives for entities within the solidarity economy. Thank you, and I want to see comments and hands. Do you have any comment, question, or input?

Sastro: This is very important—where we can start [forming] a solidarity economy. Agustiana also mentioned what is real solidarity and how we can start it. I think in our practice in Indonesia, many unions—[federation] unions, trade unions, and also national NGOs have been working together, for example, for the distribution of rice. I think tomorrow, we can look at the presentation by the KESLA from KPA. This is very important—not only for the business but now that we are using up social business. And before, it was very difficult how to directly distribute the rice. Also, in our practice with working with fisherfolk from Kepulauan Seribu (Thousand Islands), it was hard distribute fish from their [home] union to the trade union in Jabodetabek (Jakarta metropolitan area). But we need to know how to deepen further our practices. This is not only [collective] but we also how to [build] social business, people-to-people ties. That thing is very important. And so, I think we need to have participatory research. For example, in our research in KPRI, from SPP, from the trade unions, and also from fisherfolk unions, we research together the consumption of people. And our consumption is very big, but until now, we haven't [managed] it together. And if we knew how to do so, I think we can do [more] to reach the people and so we can get to know how to maintain our production based on consumption, and also our consumption based on production. I think it's very important how to further our practices and how regional alliances with the likes of Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand, [which] I think [can foster] digital markets. How we are doing together to [reach] their online markets? I think we can share, join together

[on] how to [distribute] coffee, sugar, etc. This is very important. But we need to have a manifesto for a solidarity economy and to [create guidelines]. But we don't have a concept together; I think this still needs communication with communities around Southeast Asia. Thank you. I think Agustiana can add about their practices and make up traditional production and maintain technology and knowledge on how to input them in universities and input production from SPP members. Thank you.

What are the challenges faced by civil society in advocating public policy on all issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, starting from the raw experiences in each country?

Sastro: I think this question is not only for us, for the speakers, but also for everyone. We can share from our experience, like in Indonesia, on how the trade unions, fisher unions, also the local NGOs can have solidarity. I think Agustiana can [answer] this question. Thank you.

Agustiana: The first step before building solidarity is to reflect on how we can[‘t] have our trust in our governments. That is the first thing. We start to grow the interest and [find] our strength internally and how [we can build] our potential to support our needs. The policies of each country are always [surviving through] global interventions. Even this virus—[inaudible] there are many more concerns about this virus. They [can] make mistakes. But this is an indication of the failure of globalization, of capitalism. We need to understand and struggle and fight it. We need to have some alternatives, and figure out how to sustain the solidarity that we have established and how to become the new solidarity of ideas and develop more sustainable [ones]. But even then, capitalism for us [controls] our brotherhoods. And we have to be responsible to each other and help each other and have “ownership of the collective.” That is the possible principle that we can use against globalization. I think that’s my statement. Thank you.

Cuong: Thank you very much, Agustiana. Big thanks. I know you might have a lot of messages for this event. But because we are a bit too late, so I would like to, on behalf of my comoderator,

I would like to wrap up today's session. I'm very excited too. We have speeches, music, and songs; we have pointed out the problems, the challenges, and the failures that we have been facing.

We are also sharing many of what we are doing as people and as people's organizations, and also what we have achieved and also our limitations. We have also discussed what needs to be done in the future so that we can advance and realize alternative regionalism. I would like to say thank you very much to our respective speakers, to our audience, to our interpreters, and to our technical team for supporting today's session. . . . Thank you very much.

SECOND DAY

12 November 2021

The second day of the Third Regional Conference on Alternative featured five parallel workshop discussions that focus on pressing issues in Southeast Asia. The workshops focused on education during the pandemic, food systems, healthcare practices, crossborder solidarity, and responses to the climate emergency. Each session had two presenters, two reactors, an open forum, and a workshop that focuses on how communities and organizations have engaged in crossborder solidarity, and have fostered and sustained local initiatives. Also featured was drag performance from BabeL from Saigon Vietnam of ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, entitled: “Finding your people. Finding the community that sustains you.”

WORKSHOP 1

Education/pedagogy during the pandemic both in urban and remote places: current problems, good practices during COVID-19

Presenters: Jonathan Jordan and Annabelle Jayco

Reactors: Dr. Khamphoui Saythalat and Saophorn Phoeng

Moderators: Hans Tabiola and Andrew Aeria

Hans Tabiola and Mr. Andrew Aeria served as moderators for today’s session. The session began with Mr. Tabiola’s welcoming remarks, the presentation of conference organizers, and the recognition of diverse grassroots communities participating in their respective locations. This was followed by solidarity messages from the Asia team of 11.11.11 (Belgium), Global Tapestry of Alternatives (India), UP School of Urban and Industrial Relations, and International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) Netherlands.

Mr. Tabiola introduced Mr. Andrew Aeria and reminded the participants of the house rules. Then, they introduced the speakers and reactors.

Presentation 1

Education during the pandemic and situation of migrant people along the Thai–Myanmar border

Jonathan Jordan

Help Without Frontiers (HWF) Foundation

Jonathan Jordan discussed in his talk the situation of education during the pandemic and migrant people who have been based on the Thai–Myanmar border during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since June 2020, migrant learning centers have been closed, leading to the implementation of home-based distance learning modes, utilizing online classes and worksheets. In the communities, people have resorted to these measures:

- Home-based learning (classes in communities, a unified curriculum, online classes, and worksheets)
- Material support (including hygiene equipment such as face masks, soap bars, hand sanitizers, and thermal scanners)
- Support to parents and teachers (psychosocial first aid [PFA], motivation, teacher-training for parents of early learners, child protection meaning, parents–teachers association [PTA] meetings that focus on COVID-19 updates and policy changes)
- Awareness-raising on migrant communities (education pathways)
- Student mapping (concerning the locations of students and internet access)

From 2020 until 2021, teachers traveled daily to communities of migrant students. Classes were taught outdoors—in temples, and

in students' homes. Meanwhile, teachers were provided COVID-19-prevention training, which covered how to protect themselves and their students against the coronavirus, deliver PFA, manage stress, and provide support to their students and peers.

Jonathan, however, cited challenges that significantly affected students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has significantly affected the energy of teachers and students as they adjusted to the demands of the health crisis. The pandemic has made it difficult to keep in touch with parents and plan their activities in the future. There is also a prevailing belief that children are safer in school. Some also believe that as students are still out of school, they might be at risk for drug use and addiction to online games. Teachers also have to cope with the need to ensure that there is enough contact time for students, despite their having to commute regularly. Teachers are also deemed responsible for ensuring the well-being of students; promoting crossborder cooperation, especially concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and the situation in Myanmar, by contacting education departments or ministries and organizations; and ensuring that school preparations fulfill the desired learning outcomes set forth in the 44-point checklist prepared by Thailand.

To effectively provide distance learning to communities under lockdown and amid travel restrictions, teachers developed on-hand and online learning strategies. For onsite learning, paper worksheets are distributed and collected weekly. Zoom and Facebook Messenger were utilized, and teachers provided data packages and hotspots. There are challenges in distance learning in both on-hand and online methods. Some communities are inaccessible, and there is a lack of infrastructure and compatible devices for student learning. Both methods are costly for teachers and students, and the motivation of students changes.

Jonathan also discussed emergency responses in communities living around the Thai–Myanmar border. The Border Emergency Fund reached 3,133 people, providing dry food sets and hygiene sets. Community isolation centers were set up for people who were diagnosed with COVID-19. From 52 migrant learning communities, 361 teachers were vaccinated with the help of local authorities.

Jonathan ended his talk with a presentation of the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. One is fostering solidarity, through planning, with education and health partners in the form of local organizations. There have been regular weekly meetings with teachers, parents, and communities to check up on the students' situation and the mental health and well-being of teachers. Jonathan stressed the importance of providing social and emotional support for both teachers and students, both in the form of materials and access to support helplines and resources. Connection is important in providing education to migrant-learning communities, ensuring that students are connected through mapping. The need to connect with students is important in ensuring that they get the most out of their education, as worksheets may not be enough and there is a chance of them dropping out. Jonathan stressed the importance of developing infrastructure in the form of training and donor support for alternative methods of learning, as well as funding information technology training and support amid crises. As many migrant families send their students to migrant-learning communities, Help Without Frontiers (HWF) Foundation has developed a new curriculum for those schools the future. Jonathan ended his talk with “human infrastructure” that “enables learning in its most emancipatory sense.”

Presentation 2

Annabelle Jayco

Sustainability and Participation through Lifelong Learning (SPELL)

In this workshop, Annabelle Jayco discussed how organizations can sustain the initiatives that they have started, and the participation of stakeholders as a form of reaffirming their commitment to the ASEAN community. She asks these questions: “Why is there a need for alternatives?” and “Why is there a need to be grounded on our alternatives?” Annabelle reiterates ASEAN’s guiding principles— inclusivity, equity, accessibility, continuity, flexibility, and sustainability.

Annabelle discusses the COVID-19 containment measures that have been in place in ASEAN member states. ASEAN’s actions reflected

“common policy responses” in member states, and this shows in back-to-school models in Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. For Annabelle, there are challenges associated with reopening schools, especially since marginalized and excluded sectors are disadvantaged physically, mentally, emotionally, culturally, and socially, among others. It is important to reach out to public and private sectors, national government agencies, civil society organizations, local government units, and people’s movements.

Sustainability and Participation through Lifelong Learning (SPELL) has developed initiatives that have concentrated on integrative practices. SPELL fostered on-the-ground integration among urban poor communities, rural areas, and special groups. It has always promoted “more inclusion, participation, and sustainability.” One of these initiatives is the development of an Alternative Learning System (ALS) program in Ubay, Bohol. In collaboration with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Development Academy of the Philippines, ALS is a parallel learning system that benefits people who have not finished basic education. It is a partnership between the public and private sectors, and a safety net that assures the education of farmers’ and fisherfolk’s children.

Annabelle presented the lessons that SPELL has obtained through these initiatives. One of them is to pay attention to the conditions of the youth in barangays and ensure that there are safety nets and fallouts in terms of nurturing and following through with their programs. The second lesson is to strengthen partnerships with other organizations and groups. Finally, it is important to foster a family support system.

Annabelle then ended her talk by discussing the rationale of parallel initiatives that ensure that agreements are enforced and felt on the ground. SPELL has witnessed failures and the slowness of ASEAN governments in ensuring that their policies and initiatives are felt by many. The “trickling down” of the impact of these measures is “very vital,” according to Annabelle. She then discussed the importance of fostering synergy in partnerships by engaging the private sector and participating in alternative learning systems. It is also important to generate prospects, options, and recommendations for replicating an

initiative like the ALS in other areas. Through synergy, solidarity, and working together with many organizations, SPELL has strived to make learning fun, accessible, and sustainable for students inside and outside the classroom.

Reactions

Dr. Khamphoui Saythalat began his reaction with a question, “How do we maintain the mental motivation of both teachers and students?” It has been observed that they seem to lose track of what they learn in school. Khamphoui also noticed how organizations are not adequately prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting them to work with governments for support, which they need more of. The need to move from on-site learning to online learning is more challenging, and teachers find it very hard to ensure that students learn. Parents have to choose between supporting the family through work or helping the child with learning. Khamphoui presented talking with teachers as a solution. Another challenge for teachers is the need to transmit textbook content through digital media, for which teachers are not prepared yet. Students also have to “debate” on issues that affect the ease of setting up classrooms. Khamphoui ended his reaction with a question concerning the actions that are needed to support students, especially those from low- to no-income families, regarding the accessibility of online education.

Saophorn Phoeng began his reaction with questions that concern the families of students. One pertains to the motivation and the support that families have, as well as the ways organizations involve themselves with these families. Saophorn considers how families have been affected by the pandemic economically, mentally, and physically. He raised the matter of how to assure that families are at ease with education in the middle of the pandemic. Saophorn also raised concerns regarding the way organizations can help marginalized peoples understand the sustainability and importance of education. It is also important to consider the recognition and incorporation of concerns of sectors left behind in the curriculum

(for instance, being LGBTQIA+ and awareness of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression [SOGIE] is not as accepted in Cambodia, and there have been cases of the exploitation of workers in the tourism industry and abuse against women). Saophorn also acknowledged the nuances of situations that significantly affect education in the family. Finally, he stresses the importance of ensuring synergy with both public and private stakeholders, fostering solidarity, and full support.

Open Forum

On preparations for the COVID-19 pandemic

Andrew: None of us were prepared for COVID-19, whether in government, corporate, teachers, students, or parents. Nobody was prepared. The children were excited, initially. After some time, they too began to realize this was not a very pleasant holiday. In Singapore, you probably had the infra[structure] and financial resources, but you were not prepared. In that context, we all had to innovate. Some did better than others. Others did not do well.

On the vital role of parents and family in promoting best practices

Andrew: They pick up the modules, coach them, etc. But there are areas where the parents are not available (e.g., parents are OFWs); so guardians help. What if the child has difficulty responding? The children answer as a group (solidarity). We attach these to our learning modalities. We have to always remember the mental and emotional state of the children under the pandemic.

Teachers agreed to wait until the evenings when the parents came home from work because students use their parents' phones and are being supported by their parents—those who [have] involvement in their children's education.

Motivation is really a problem. How [do we] motivate children living far from their friends to complete their modules, etc.? Some parents don't want their children to continue their education in this situation. They're waiting for the schools to reopen. We try to be more understanding. Parents have their own stresses. Try to keep the motivation up, and keep the parents more involved. Is the curriculum used for face-to-face classes no longer suitable for online classes?

We are pushing children to be financially literate, i.e., counting arithmetic; we are pushing children to be ready for urban-based life. Are we doing this incorrectly? Also, in the context of global climate change, are we making a big mistake? Maybe we should be teaching them farming techniques.

Jonathan: Create new learning materials that have a more worldly focus, [like a] home learning pack for young learners or fun activities booklet. [All] developed with teachers, and supplementary to the worksheet which is curriculum-based.

Annabelle: There's so much premium on science, math, and language. It's hard to interpret modules. The content is designed for tourism education. The support system in the curriculum is not designed to help the industry. Content in the alternative learning system is industry-related. Where do we come in, as civil society? Understanding the self, family, community, industry, environment, etc.

Andrew: That's the danger of one-size-fits-all education.

Khamphoui: Address today's needs of the students. We need collaborations with corporations to address the technological needs of the students. That's a dilemma between the private sector and organizations.

Andrew: [There is a] big gap between ASEAN governments' commitment/principles/vision in terms of education and what is happening on the ground. Not everybody has access. Children are sharing smartphones with three siblings. They [live] with no internet connection. Children in rural areas [have] to get data signals to submit their homework.

Panel 1 Workshop

Panel 1's workshop focused on education and pedagogy during the pandemic in urban and remote places. It also centered on the way organizations can support these initiatives, noting that governments "talk as if everybody has access." The workshop focuses on these action points: sustainable accessibility, proper support, and impact assessment.

Sustainable accessibility. Sustainable accessibility entails the need to practice self-care, stand on one's own, and discern proper coping mechanisms, especially when people are stuck in their homes. Families can help each other in discussing these mechanisms. Organizations often ask about how they could do this, showing that they have to reach out and organize more people and influence them to recognize the importance of good governance. This leads to the promotion of appropriate policies that trickle down to financing.

Proper support. The workshop revealed that proper support is needed especially for migrant children. Organizations have to consider committing themselves to more advocacy work, lobbying for equal footing, and recruiting more volunteers.

Impact assessment. Impact assessment should be evidence-based. These results can help in creating mechanisms to report on issues that would persist even after the pandemic.

There should be solidarity with national and regional organizations, and more groups can also be called for support. It is important to maintain networks among members of organizations and groups across all levels, for example, social workers at the regional, local, and national workers. There should also be community-level support. We have to find new ways to support children during the pandemic.

WORKSHOP 2

Local food movements, pantries, kitchens, gardens, and the importance of health, food, and nutrition

Presenters: Syamsudin Fujianti and Kassirin Phiboon

Reactors: Maria Jovielyn Unlayao, Leonardo F. Soares, and Fintailan Jenevie Cornelio

Moderators: Elsa "Uka" Pinto, KSI (Timor Leste) and Ryan Silverio, ASC (Philippines)

Elsa "Uka" Pinto and Ryan Silverio served as moderators for this workshop, which focused on the central role of food, food systems, and food movements in advancing regional integration. As the pandemic paralyzed global supply chains, the pandemic has spotlighted issues regarding the movement of people, goods, and services. Local food movements and mutual aid efforts in providing food have flourished amid the pandemic. They have catered to the health, nutrition, and well-being of peoples and communities.

Presentation 1

Syamsudin Fujianti

The Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA, Agrarian Reform Consortium)

Syamsudin Fujianti, with Rizki Estrada serving as interpreter, discussed the solidarity efforts of his organization, the Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA, Agrarian Reform Consortium). The KPA has aimed to make the implementation of agrarian reform a reality in Indonesia. Speaking in Bahasa, Syamsudin discussed how fisherfolks and farmers struggle to reclaim their land. According to the KPA in 2021, 37 percent or 654,854 hectares have been mapped (persil) and proposed by 105 KPA members spread over 532 villages/villages, 104 regencies, 20 provinces, controlled, occupied, cultivated, and guarded by 201,299 families in 413,837 hectares of land.

Syamsudin discussed the purpose of the Gerakan Solidaritas Lumbung Agraria (GeSLA, Agrarian Granary Solidarity Movement). The GeSLA's principles include creating a rural–urban solidarity movement to ensure that food is available for groups affected by the pandemic. GeSLA also aims to mobilize farmers to produce healthy and economically viable food for many sectors that were affected by the pandemic, especially priority consumers such as workers, fisherfolk, urban poor communities, and small traders. The GeSLA also aims to break food corporations' long and expensive chain of production, distribution, and consumption.

The GeSLA's approaches are needed to ensure that members of the KPA, fisherfolk, the urban poor, and the union, are becoming resilient. From April to June 2020, there were food donations from solidarity actions. The KPA has also initiated food exchanges among communities. The members of the KPA and marginalized groups will take part in the next phase of solidarity efforts.

Presentation 2

Small-Scale Rice Farmers During the Pandemic

Kassirin Phiboon

Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN), Thailand

Kassirin Phiboon discussed the situation of small-scale rice farmers during the pandemic and how they dealt with its impact. Kassirin also examined the role of the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) in addressing the effects of the health crises. Thailand's rice production has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its fourth wave in July 2021 significantly impacted several dimensions, from social life to rice production. Since the implementation of the rice-pledging policy in 2014, rice farmers have been facing a crisis, and this crisis has been exacerbated by the increasingly intense competition at the international level. The declining prices of rice have also been attributed to restrictions on interprovincial travel due to lockdowns.

Kassirin points out that organic rice farmers have affected relatively less than traditional rice farmers, yet both of them have reported decreasing incomes. Aside from rice production, organic farmers have engaged in various marketing channels, including organic markets, health shops, hotels, restaurants, universities, schools, government agencies, community markets, and online platforms. They can sell their products at a lower and negotiable price. To ensure food security, conventional and organic farmers can grow their own food and source forage from forests, other localities, and community markets. Organic farmers, however, prioritize home consumption and are self-reliant, leading them to sell their products at a higher price. However, for organic farmers, home consumption is a priority. So that's why organic farmers have seen higher prices than conventional farmers. Organic rice farmers have more self-reliance. Many farmers in communities are young and have been looking for programs that would be beneficial for them during the pandemic. The Thai government has launched support programs that were inaccessible to many people.

Conventional rice farmers had to adapt to the current situation. They first decreased the use of chemical fertilizers to decrease farm labor costs. They also [added] income-generating [projects], including rice processing to support their families. Farmers have also adopted more crops and raised livestock on their farms to create food farms. One of these measures includes integrated farming of vegetables in rice fields.

Kassirin discussed the sustainable agricultural community model, one that works for the needs of the communities. The first step is creating communities of producers and consumers, facilitating learning and knowledge-sharing to access organic food, and creating a self-sufficient economy with a healthier environment and general social well-being within the community. Communities often cover villages, but there are groups of farmers in rural areas and consumers in cities that form part of the same community. The second step is expanding these communities. The final step is empowering farmers and consumers.

Reactions

Ryan Silverio first presented a comment from Bae Merlina Dumotan. In Filipino, she commented that on farms in Bukidnon, corn, sugar, cassava, and rice are priced low. Maria Jovielyn Unlayao, Leonardo F. Saores, and Fintlayan Jenevie Cornelio served as panel reactors for this panel.

Maria Jovielyn Unlayao, from the Philippines, noted similarities between the KPA in Indonesia and BuyAnihanPH in the Philippines. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fragility of the supply chain infrastructure. In addition, the Philippine government was unable to adequately address the needs of the population. People ended up lacking food amid a crisis. As such, communities had to initiate feeding programs for the communities and rely not on capitalists but on their own resources. BuyAnihan PH serves as an “open source” for food producers and the community. They gather information about food producers and encourage members of the community to buy produce such as vegetables directly from farmers, without relying on traders. The COVID-19 pandemic has enabled the development of marketing channels. BuyAnihan PH, like the KPA, engages in the creation of a “farmgate” that allows communities to source their food directly from farmers, allowing the latter to sell their products directly to communities and markets without the need for middlemen or traders. This way, food becomes less expensive for the community.

Jovielyn cites BuyAnihanPH’s Thank Our Farmers campaign, which is inspired by the “solidarity, charity, and bayanihan spirit” initiated by the Philippines’ Community Pantry Movement. Farmers ought to be considered heroes, and it is important to raise awareness of their situation, as they are aged between 30 and 60 and they do not want their children to engage in farming anymore. Farmers supply sustenance, and the price of food from them has become lower. In addition, community initiatives have been existing in many parts of the world, including Southeast Asia. These initiatives and movements ought to inspire more people.

Leonardo F. Soares presented the Uniaun Agrikultores Ermera (UNAER, Agricultural *Union of Ermera*), a union representing coffee farmers in Ermera, Timor-Leste. The majority of the Timorese population produces coffee, and trade in plantations has forced coffee farmers to sell their produce at a lower price. UNAER serves as an umbrella for coffee producers in Ermera, and the organization defends the right to land, calls for increased access to food and the means of production, and fosters fair markets.

Leonardo discussed the food movement chain in relation to the socioeconomic crisis caused by the pandemic. This crisis has affected both rich and poor countries, prompting the need to involve all of humanity. For UNAER, “capital does not indicate people’s life and solidarity.” Many people in rural areas in Timor-Leste and even urban areas such as Dili have called for food aid and assistance because of the inaccessibility of food and money and of the inability to conduct business and farming activities. People from the lower class cannot survive. Lockdowns have also led to a disconnect between producers and consumers, with municipalities being affected by oversupply. Unable to travel to Dili because of lockdown restrictions, municipalities cannot sell goods, affecting many communities by restricting their access to food. Although the government provided USD 70 million for economic recovery, food aid, and basic needs, middlemen and corporations continued to profit off the money, using them to fund corporations at the expense of grassroots efforts.

There are challenges facing agriculture, housing, and food security. For its agriculture budget, only 1.5 percent was allocated in 2019, and in 2020, the allocation was only 1.9 percent. The government merely proclaims that it is for strengthening agriculture, yet it fails to commit to its promises at the policy level. The producers, therefore, have to import from neighboring countries. In addition, the government also engages in land conversion, taking 30 hectares of agricultural land to build a university. The oil industry in Timor-Leste has also been a challenge for agricultural workers. The lack of government intervention leads to farmers losing motivation to continue with their livelihoods and proves that the government heeds the interests of corporations.

The global pandemic has become a reminder not only of the importance of human lives but also of the need for the lower class to organize themselves and establish solidarity at the national and international levels. Leonardo also demanded that people pay attention to alternatives that communities can engage in. One of these initiatives is ensuring self-sufficiency in terms of food and the needs of communities, utilizing an agroecology approach to protecting the environment and its components while promoting livelihoods. To foster a solidarity economy, Leonardo encouraged people to form cooperatives, especially during the pandemic when communities need staples such as rice. Popular education is also advocated during the pandemic, recognizing how labor unions foster a collectivist perspective in addressing the current situation of communities, and addressing tendencies towards individualism.

Solidarity among farmers in many countries in the world is highly important, and it is vital to assert that farmers have to access land and ensure that they are protected by conventions on human rights and constitutions. Producers have to serve everyone, and they have to protect farmers. The government of Timor-Leste has failed to address problems that afflict farmers. It is also important to intervene to protect the environment and its components.

Fintailan Jenevie Cornelio from Inged Fintailan (the indigenous women's council) discussed initiatives that indigenous peoples, particularly the Teduray in the Philippines, undertake to ensure food security. She shows how women, who are child-bearers, take principal roles in agriculture. Nongovernment organizations have become valuable partners in sustaining their campaigns. Even when new technologies have already existed, the community continues to sustain its indigenous system of farming. She introduces the concept of *sulagad*, which is used to describe how food sovereignty that relies on organic and indigenous practices can be used as an alternative to commercial farming practices that rely extensively on chemical-based fertilizers and pesticides. Teduray farmers visit the Sulagad Center, where they source "traditional" seed varieties that they grow and nurture. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people continued to practice organic practices and rituals during the dry season, remembering their leaders in the past.

Jenevie pointed out the importance of *bayanihan* in indigenous farming, showing that people can help each other without asking for a reward and without basing such assistance on a “caste system.” Helping unites people, and it has been proven by the community since the COVID-19 pandemic started. In addition, spiritual leaders performed rituals, and local damalas were conducted, involving “self-quarantines” in rivers and forests, together with the families. They shared food with their neighbors and companions. In times of distress, many people return to the practices of solidarity, and they also recognize the need to assert the rights to land and the protection of the environment, which is tethered to the life given by Tulos—the Creator. Women, despite having a small movement in Mindanao, together with Southeast Asian organizations, help each other by fostering sustainable agriculture. As such, the Sulagad system campaigns for the protection of ancestral lives.

Open Forum/Workshop

The second panel’s workshop focused on these guiding prompts:

- 1.) What initiatives can be undertaken to sustain and enrich these local alternative practices?
- 2.) How might we scale up these local alternative practices at the regional and national level?
- 3.) Give examples of concrete cases of communities working together across Southeast Asia which already exemplify cross-border solidarity.

On initiatives to sustain local alternative practices

Josephine Parilla narrated how PATAMABA (National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines), in practicing social solidarity, set up a community kitchen during the pandemic, allowing people in the community to purchase food at a lower price. They invested around PHP 200 to PHP 2,000, ensuring that there is equity

regarding the proceeds of the activity and the availability of healthy local food at lower prices. PATAMABA has also produced products as a way to promote economic activity in communities. It has also donated personal protective equipment (PPE) sets, produced through funds sourced by volunteers, to hospitals and frontline establishments. They also provided home care products to the community.

Kassirin narrated the actions of the AAN in ensuring that small-scale farmers are protected in terms of agricultural input costs. Fertilizers, gasoline, and seeds cost high; however, production is cheap. Farmers also face land issues, and new laws have been adopted to restrict farmers further. They have been affected by the pandemic, and have lost sources of income and jobs. Therefore, AAN has developed policies for small-scale farmers to ensure that agricultural input costs are correct and farmer products are not priced low.

Leo Soares discusses its alliance with Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute (KSI), conducting solidarity actions that benefit the people of Dili, bringing food to communities that suffer from food scarcity, and ensuring that their dietary needs are met. The alliance also encourages farmers to produce more food and diversify production during the pandemic. Leo notices that the food chain runs from farmers and producers to corporations and their middlemen, only for products to be resold to farmers.

On scaling up local alternative practices

Leo calls for interventions such as farmer-to-farmer solidarity at the regional level, without the need for middlemen and corporations. Grassroots organizations can connect farmers from Indonesia and Vietnam to farmers in Timor-Leste, as a way to intervene to supplant middlemen and corporations. Such actions can be done in order to ensure that there are alternatives that do not rely on capitalist corporations.

Joseph Purugganan proceeds with his response to the second question on community kitchens. Organizing and spreading test sites for community kitchens involve policy support. Sulagad lobbies for local ordinances issued by local government units (LGUs). To receive mainstream support, it is important to foster regional- and national-level efforts. Joseph asked questions regarding ASEAN policies supporting sustainable agriculture. He also cited seed banks as an important initiative that supports traditional knowledge of agriculture, resists commercial interests, and favors community interests. Joseph pointed out that the United Nations' food and agricultural policies have been favoring corporate approaches more than community-based practices. As such, Joseph called for monitoring these policies and resisting trade agreements that “can undermine community efforts.”

On concrete cases of communities working together

Joseph noted that seed banks are indeed “an important initiative” that supports traditional knowledge and serves as a form of resistance against corporations that threaten the interests of the community.

Synthesis

Elsa mentioned how during the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations are encouraged to return to the practices by communities. These practices have been revived after being brushed aside by practices of patronage politics. Therefore, national solidarity projects have been in place in many countries, nations, and regions, and they come in the form of cooperatives. In Cambodia, the passage of a law restricting farmers from land ownership negatively affected food security. In this case, the alternative movement becomes a way to safeguard knowledge from communities regarding agroecology.

Ryan reiterated how in times of crisis, policies that cater to the agriculture sector are not in place. The increased cost of production

becomes a burden to producers, while overproduction and output gaps pose problems. Farmer-to-farmer cooperatives show the need to ensure that there are humane and peasant-oriented trade policies to respond to rice trade restrictions in the ASEAN. In addition, ASEAN must issue a statement supporting food movements and local ordinances that provide incentives to solidarity economy actors. There have been some efforts in the Philippines, including the acquisition of seeds, to incentivize solidarity efforts.

The workshop generated these demands and calls:

- 1.) Foster and strengthen social solidarity economy among communities nationally and across borders through community kitchens, production of food according to need, and sharing food among communities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.) Study alternative solutions that strengthen solidarity between farmers like cooperatives and Farmer-to-Farmer Solidarity networks to diminish the control of corporations and middlemen within nations and across borders.
- 3.) Promote agroecology, popular education, and the use of indigenous and local knowledge to ensure food security, protect the environment, and resist corporations.
- 4.) Support policies that protect farmers, lower the cost of production, and ensure communities' access to food.

The workshop also proposed these collective actions:

- 1.) Monitor food policies within countries and across borders that support farmers, food security, agriculture, and the environment. Resist policies that undermine community efforts.
- 2.) Study, collaborate, and scale up solidarity networks (e.g., Farmer-to-Farmer Solidarity relationships and cooperatives) from the national to the regional.

WORKSHOP 3:

Community-based healthcare practices

Presenters: Teera Watcharapranee, Thippawan Mokpa, and Sandyawan Sumardi

Reactors: Sisto Dos Santos, Putheavy OI, and Marivic Atacador

Moderators: Dr. Benjamin Quiñones (ASEC, Philippines) and Putheavy OI (aMP3, Cambodia)

This workshop tackled the deep crisis of healthcare systems amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of community-based healthcare practices. The virus has highlighted pre-existing inequities in society in terms of health outcomes of various segments of the population, which are stratified by class, religion, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, age, and ability. The profit-orientedness of healthcare is also manifested in the unequal access to COVID-19 vaccines by rich and poor people, and within and across countries. With the public and private healthcare systems failing ordinary citizens, communities and organizations have stepped up to fill the vacuum and serve the needs of the people in the frontlines of the crisis.

Presentation 1

Teera Watcharapranee

Stop Drink Network (Thailand)

Teera Watcharapranee discussed the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand and the way alcohol consumption became linked to the increase in the number of cases. The third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country began in July 2021 and peaked around August–September 2021. Health services in Bangkok were unable to cope with the increase in the number of daily cases from 5,000 to a peak of 10,000 cases per day. Patients had to wait for ambulances, available beds, doctors, and oxygen tanks; some patients died waiting. In November 2021, around 500 cases per day were recorded.

Teera pointed out the relationship between alcohol consumption and coronavirus outbreaks. Alcohol consumption is considered a contributor to the spread of COVID-19, with infections spreading to closed spaces such as pubs, bars, and entertainment venues, and with alcohol consumption affecting a person's immunity. For Teera, alcohol is an "unnecessary commodity" in times of crisis, and many people falsely believe that drinking alcohol helps kill viruses in the throat. The Thai government regulated alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic, banning it during the first wave in 2020. In 2021, during the third wave, pubs and bars were closed, restaurants were prohibited to sell alcohol, and only private consumption was allowed.

Stop Drink Network Association is a nongovernment organization established in 2003. Founded by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, Stop Drink Network Association considers alcohol consumption as a risk factor for issues concerning personal health, family security, social security, and economic security. The association has five working areas: policy advocacy, youth network, community base, capacity-building, and social campaign for behavior change. Membership in the organization is voluntary, with 10,000 members in 77 provinces in Thailand. So far, Stop Drink Network has ten sites of focus. These sites are slum areas and flats populated by lower-income households who rely on day jobs.

- Kudikhao Bangkok Noi District
- Wat Kangna Thung Khru District
- Ladprao 45 Huai Khwang District
- Eua Athon Pangkapi District
- Sukjareanpattana Panhkapi District
- Lank Flat Pattana Ladpran District
- Talad Bangken Laksi District
- Karn Kaha 320 Laksi District
- Karn Kaha 302 Laksi District
- Roam Patana Laksi District

Stop Drink Network Association aims to discourage alcohol consumption, with communities stopping altogether for three years. They are a group of people who have quit drinking and instead devoted themselves to volunteer work. They convince people to stop drinking. During the third COVID-19 wave in Thailand, when many severe cases were reported, the association shared information, knowledge, and experience. They have decided to use the power of the community to curb this crisis.

The association works with communities in various ways. It holds online meetings for members to share experiences and call for support for their needs. It has provided personal protective equipment, hand sanitizers, and masks, and it also supports herbal medicine. It helps fund a community kitchen, including the budget for ingredients and cooking equipment, and sells food at an affordable price. The proceeds are used to continue procuring food. The organization has collected data from ten communities for coordination with outside agencies.

Stop Drink Network Association has forwarded physical and mental health measures for the benefit of the community. There are 10 actions concerning body and mental health:

- 1.) Establish a team and a coordination point area
- 2.) Provide protective equipment
- 3.) Support food and water
- 4.) Support herbal, alternative medicine
- 5.) Coordinate with food delivery personnel to deliver herbal medicines
- 6.) Give advice and encourage people
- 7.) Connect with a group line application to share information
- 8.) Ensure coordination between severe patients and agencies and NGOs in primary care regarding fingertip oximeters, oxygen tanks, and referrals

- 9.) Get favipiravir (which can be obtained from a doctor)
- 10.) Provide RT-PCR examinations courtesy of agencies.

Teera also presented the teams formed under the Stop Drink Network. A youth team and a delivery team focus on food and herbal, traditional medicine (e.g., fingerroot and green chiretta). The team also delivers oxygen tanks, medicine kits, and ATK tests. They also facilitate the transfer of family patients. Another team focuses on food deliveries. The association also provides isolation tents, kitchens, information centers, and food where people can pay what they can pay. They also source funds from donations, and in return, the money is used to procure food ingredients.

There are lessons from the experience of the Stop Drink Network Association. It is important to build a base in communities with social capital. Communities have to develop leadership skills, coordinator skills, relationship/teamwork skills, data information and sharing, and transforming skills. Team skills have to be improved as well, including empowering new leaders among young men, cooks, former drinkers, and elders. People have learned to foster strong relationships and empathy among each other, and teams form within the organization and with outside agencies. Volunteers have developed pride in their contributions. As such, the organization has provided social opportunities for ex-drinkers and the youth to help and convince others to reduce, if not quit alcohol consumption. Finally, food kitchens and information centers are indeed important as public areas where people can share information.

For Teera, there are things that the organization has to do in the future. One is to sustain a volunteer team to fight an “economic education emotion.” Second is monitoring the “four waves” and connecting them to the local government, local health services, and other NGOs.

Presentation 2

Thippawan Mokpa

Director, HealthNet Foundation (Thailand)

Thippawan Mokpa discussed the lessons that the HealthNet Foundation has gained in establishing community-based healthcare practices amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To address the health crisis, HealthNet has fostered a good working relationship with teams in the community, between government agencies, community-based organizations, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs). Core teams have the potential to ensure community health, broaden knowledge on COVID-19, and supply equipment. The foundation has also recognized the importance of integrating budget, materials, and staff in addressing COVID-19 in the community.

HealthNet has nurses who administer COVID-19 vaccines to elderly people in their houses. The organization also provides vaccines in Tambon Health-Promoting Hospital. It also sustains a campaign to raise awareness of the virus through audio-dramas and radio-spots to prevent infections. Village leaders and health volunteers visit people to share knowledge about COVID-19 and preventive equipment. The organization also supports prevention in communities by providing, through village leaders and health volunteers, equipment such as thermometers, alcohol, hand gels, cotton, and surgical masks. The core team also produces alcohol hand gel for people in the community, and they hold meetings regarding COVID-19.

HealthNet had prepared its core team in the community before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in 2020. It has helped improve the mindset of health workers in dealing with health concerns from a multidimensional perspective, covering mental well-being, economic status, social status, culture, and gender. It enhanced capacity-building among the core team, ensuring the development of communication, leadership, and teamwork skills. Finally, it has encouraged cooperation between the government, the community, and NGOs.

Thippawan shared the background of the core team in the community. It is comprised of local government organizations, the Tamblon Health-Promoting Hospital, community leaders, health volunteers, child development centers in communities, and the Tamblon Council for Children and Youth in the community. There are five areas in the Tamblon in four provinces in northeastern Thailand.

Presentation 3

Dealing with the Second-Wave Pandemic Tsunami: Patungan Rakyat/Citizens Help Citizens for the Urban Poor of Jakarta, the Capital of Indonesia

Sandyawan Sumardi

Director, Jaringan Relawan Kemanusiaan (Indonesia)

Sandyawan Sumardi discussed the efforts of the Patungan Rakyat, an initiative of citizens helping the urban poor in Jakarta. He first discussed the impact of the second wave of the coronavirus “tsunami” in early June 2021 in Indonesia. This significantly affected Jakarta, the capital of the country. On July 15, 2021, the total number of coronavirus cases reached 2,726,803 people, with an 2.13 percent increase from the cases recorded on July 14, 2021 (56,757 new cases). From July 1 to 15, 2021, the average number of daily COVID-19 cases was 37,407, doubling from 17,697 people per day from June 16 to 30, 2021. The daily case growth rate increased from 0.87 percent (June 16–30, 2021) to 1.54 percent (July 1–15, 2021). On July 15, 2021, Indonesia held the record for the highest single-day increase in the number of coronavirus cases globally, with 56,757 new cases.³ Sumardi also noted the high number of coronavirus cases in Indonesia, with 480,199 active cases on July 15, 2021, alongside 32,615 daily recoveries. Indonesia also reported the highest number of daily COVID-19 deaths globally—1,007 people on July 11, 2021 (CNN Indonesia 2021). For Sandyawan, data concerning COVID-19 cases have become a concern in Indonesia’s healthcare

³ Following Indonesia were Brazil (52,789), England (48,553), India (39,072), and the United States (36,674). This data was reported on July 15, 2021.

system, impacting health workers who have to work for longer hours. On June 13, 2021, the Indonesian Ministry of Health reported 145 cases caused by variants of concern through periodic whole-genome sequencing. These variants of concern have been linked to increased transmissibility, virulence, and decreasing vaccine effectiveness.

In July 2021, the Special Capital Region of Jakarta was seen to enter its “worst phase” of the pandemic. Within a month, the number of COVID-19 cases in the capital during the second wave exceeded the number of cases during the first wave, which peaked in nine months. The emergence of variants was linked to the increase in the number of cases, leading to fears of a healthcare collapse in the region due to overcrowding in hospitals and limited personnel.

The urban poor in Jakarta

The COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia has led to an increase in the number of people who are suffering from poverty. The Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik, BPS) reported in March 2021 a poverty rate of 4.72 percent in Jakarta—the highest poverty rate in the city since 2000 (4.96 percent then). As such, around 502,000 people in Indonesia were deemed poor. The BPS has also shown that Jakarta’s open unemployment rate was 8.51 percent in February 2021 (with 119,824 unemployed because of the pandemic). High poverty incidence and unemployment rates, which have been exacerbated by employment terminations, were linked to a weaker purchasing power among people and to regulations that aim to stop the spread of the coronavirus. For Sandiawan, the implementation of Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement (CARE; *Pembarlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat, PPKM*) from July 3 to 20, 2021 led to an increase in the population below the poverty line in Jakarta. This is because CARE limits many community activities, including businesses, purchases, and sales.

Sandiawan pointed out that the urban poor were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its effects were felt not only in Jakarta but also in the surrounding buffer areas of Bogor, Tangerang, Depok, and Bekasi. Sandiawan added that neoliberalism has significantly

contributed to the increasing difficulty for people living in poverty to access economic, social, health, cultural, and political services.

Patungan Rakyat: Citizens helping citizens

The Patungan Rakyat initiative was organized during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic in Indonesia. The initiative focused on aiding residents of the urban villages of Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (Jabodetabek), especially those who have difficulty accessing hospitals. This lack of access led people to self-isolate; however, there were no suitable isolation places nor access to vitamins and medicines.

In light of these shortcomings, the Patungan Rakyat initiative has exerted efforts to assist people during the second coronavirus wave by searching, purchasing, and lending oxygen tanks; giving medicines and vitamins; and providing consultations with doctors and access to hospitals, among others. Patungan Rakyat has also provided personal protective equipment (PPE) sets, face shields, vitamins, and minerals for health workers in regional hospitals, including those in Central Java and the island of East Nusa Tenggara. Those regions have found access to government facilities difficult. Patungan Rakyat has also provided basic food assistance (including rice, oil, and instant noodles) to urban poor communities. As a humanitarian movement, Patungan Rakyat is guided by these principles:

- Unlimited humanitarian solidarity and cooperation
- Citizens helping citizens
- Preferential option for the poor
- Clean living and social distancing
- Becoming rooted, self-supporting, and sustainable
- “Fastening your belt”
- Alliance with nature
- Solidarity and subsidiarity

Patungan Rakyat has been well-received by residents, whose reactions were published on the web portal, *kitabisa.com*. Residents donated at least Rp 1,000, and some contributed up to Rp 5,000,000. Many have also offered prayers and messages of encouragement. Through these donations, they were able to purchase vitamins, and medicines, and 15 oxygen tanks with regulators and hoses. These donations also helped facilitate doctor–patient relations through consultations, referrals, and hospital access for the benefit of Jabodetabek residents who had to self-isolate in their homes. Patungan Rakyat has also been ready to support similar initiatives in different areas.

Patungan Rakyat, as a “people’s joint venture” movement, has helped save 67 urban poor residents in Jabotabek, who were deemed to be in “terminal illness” due to COVID-19. However, seven people still died while they were receiving assistance; comorbidities have increased the likelihood of a person dying of COVID-19.

Gotong royong

The concept of *gotong royong*, which translates to “mutual cooperation,” was drawn from Sukarno’s speech on June 1, 1945. In that speech, Sukarno presented the “final essence” of the *Pancasila*, or five state principles of the future Indonesian state⁴ being merged into one. “If you squeeze the five into three and the three into one, then only one genuine Indonesian word can be obtained, namely the word *gotong royong*. The Indonesian state that we establish must be a mutual cooperation state.” The concept of *gotong royong* has been the guiding principle of citizen solidarity and volunteer movements during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the collapse of the health system in Indonesia prompted people to help not only themselves but also others.

Patungan Rakyat has been involved in relaying information on COVID-19 patients, helping those who have been under isolation and needing oxygen, donating to children who have lost their parents, participating in information drives to help patients access services, and

4 The Pancasila constitutes five principles: Indonesian nationalism, humanism, democracy, social welfare, and belief in one God.

assisting vulnerable groups who were neglected by the state and have been hit the hardest during the pandemic.

Patungan Rakyat is not the only movement in Indonesia. There have been similar “workers-help-workers” movements in the country, and professionals have been participating in these efforts and supporting a fractured public health system. They have helped construct coffins, arrange funeral services, and work in ambulances, among others. This kind of volunteering provides concrete assistance. As such, gotong royong has come to be interpreted in terms of action. The volunteer movement has filled the gaps created by the government in terms of policies and genuine aid, which was subject to corruption. Sandyawan recalls the adage, “We are in the same storm but not in the same boat,” showing how people who have the resources, strength, and energy help people who are weak, helpless, and in need. While the spirit of gotong royong has to persist, the Indonesian government must be held accountable for its actions and shortcomings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many issues that affect people, including collapsing health services and personnel, data manipulation in tracking and sampling cases, poor risk communications (compounded by narratives from “buzzers” that polarize communities politically), and increased death tolls that have reached thousands. Sandyawan quoted Chris Wibisana, a student at the Hubungan Internasional Universitas Indonesia. “I realize that in this republic, black and white [are] meaningless in the hands of the government as long as it interferes with the interests of the rulers. Therefore, from this pandemic, we learn from the fact that it is not the government that has saved us all this time, but mutual cooperation between citizens.”

Walk with God with a humble heart

Sandyawan ended his presentation with a call for the humanitarian solidarity movement. He also reiterates the importance of following minimum health and safety protocols, including regular handwashing, proper mask use, social distancing, avoiding crowds, avoiding dining together, and reducing mobility. He also highlighted the importance of encouraging the unvaccinated to get vaccines and strengthening

the immunity of those who have received their doses. He calls for “awakening the spirit of limitless humanitarian solidarity” and pushing through with the struggle to strengthen life, and practice humility.

Reference

CNN Indonesia. 2021. “Salip India-Brasil, Kematian Baru Covid RI Tertinggi di Dunia [Indonesia’s New Covid Death Rate Overtakes India’s and Brazil, is Highest in the World]” 12 July 2021. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/internasional/20210712103839-106-666343/salip-india-brasil-kematian-baru-covid-ri-tertinggi-di-dunia>

Reactions

Sisto Dos Santos (Director, Asosisaun HAK, Timor-Leste) commended the presenters from Thailand and Indonesia, finding comparisons with the human rights situation in Timor-Leste. The pandemic has impacted the way Asosisaun HAK sustains connections with many communities. Sisto also acknowledges the difficulty—vis-a-vis their colleagues in Indonesia and Thailand—in mobilizing people in Timor-Leste amid the coronavirus pandemic due to the lack of resources. Total lockdowns have forced organizations to negotiate with the government for delivering services.

Lockdowns have affected the way Asosisaun HAK delivered services to students. Timor-Leste suffers from poor internet connectivity, and people only hear news from the government. The politicization of the coronavirus pandemic even affects young pupils. People fear going to the hospital because they believe that they might test positive from swab tests or become infected there.

Sisto also notes how class discrimination affects students. While some pupils and their families get to live in hotels, others live in cabs or try to take advantage of the situation to get benefits. Only a few human rights organizations and nongovernment organizations have

provided for the logistical needs of residents in Dili, particularly those who are studying at universities. University students live in small rental hostels. Sisto has worked on amplifying the voices of people in need, especially for enough food and clean water for those in need.

Finally, Sisto has also noted the way the Timorese government has engaged in propaganda and enabled people with vested interests to take advantage of the coronavirus pandemic. While the government was able to provide rice subsidies, it was deemed too late. There is also a lack of political will to address health issues. Sisto noted that the government allocated only 10 percent of its budget for health, and hospitals do not have medicine. People have developed distrust in hospitals, have been “traumatized” by the government’s messaging regarding the coronavirus, and have stayed at home when they are sick.

Putheavy Ol (aMP3, Cambodia) recalled her experience with the lockdown in Cambodia, with mobility restrictions affecting the way people access markets and each other. Putheavy also noted how governments have to be responsible for issues that affect their countries’ healthcare systems. Providing quality healthcare is an obligation to the people.

Marivic Atacador (President, Bantay Kalusugan Pampamayanan [BKP, *Community Health Watch*], Philippines) presents questions regarding the way organizations help people amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Delivering her reaction in Filipino, she first asked about preparations that organizations have taken to address the needs of the people during the health crisis. For instance, local government units (LGUs) have helped fund the initiatives of nongovernment organizations (NGOs). However, should the time when help from funders cease, how would organizations be sustained and even run without money? Marivic also raised questions regarding the involvement of people in communities in ensuring that they understand the importance of family health, in disseminating information, and in learning how to help each other.

Bantay Kalusugan Pampamayanan has a health-monitoring initiative during the pandemic despite the lack of human resources.

Citing the experience of BKP, Marivic envisions that communities have to become involved in initiatives. They ensure that they engage in sustainable ways to maximize funding for services even without LGUs' assistance. While BKP's visits were limited due to a total lockdown, many resource speakers spoke in communities, raising awareness on COVID-19, creating group chats for disseminating information regarding the community health situation, conducting online health monitoring sessions, and providing seminars regarding the coronavirus.

Open Forum/Workshop

Like Panel 2, Panel 3 focuses on the same set of questions.

- 1.) What initiatives can be undertaken to sustain and enrich these local alternative practices?
- 2.) How might we scale up these local alternative practices at the regional and national level?
- 3.) Give examples of concrete cases of communities working together across Southeast Asia which already exemplifies crossborder solidarity.
- 4.) Aside from these questions, Dr. Benjamin Quiñones also presented a question that incorporates the perspective of gender in healthcare, "Why do you think we need to prioritize and put emphasis on women's health and childcare in the pursuit of community health practices?"

On initiatives to sustain and enrich local practices

Teera Watcharapranee noted how the Stop Drink Network in Thailand created an information database in ten communities so that they could coordinate with outside agencies. They spearheaded the use of traditional herbal medicine, including fingerroot and green

chiretta to help relieve COVID-19 symptoms. They also created a program that helped members of the community develop skills in leadership, coordination, fostering relationships, information-sharing, and transformation to ensure the development of a sense of solidarity and empathy.

Dr. Benjamin Quiñones discussed the roles that peoples' initiatives play in delivering and sustaining social protections for the community. As the government and the private sector have failed to address the need to ensure social protection for people, alternative-regionalism movements have recognized initiatives that help people, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Benjamin noted how community kitchens in both Jakarta and the Philippines have significantly contributed to the cause. Recounting his visit to Jakarta in 2019, he narrated the case of the local community pantry and how it was able to hire a cook who was also a nutritionist. Women in the community can now purchase food and save time from cooking food in their homes. Indonesian women can also contribute to cooking. The sustainability of the community pantry in Jakarta attracted more people within and outside the village.

The Community Pantry Movement in the Philippines, according to Benjamin, has also taken cues from the need for volunteerism in sustaining the needs of communities. Established in Maginhawa Street, Quezon City, the Community Pantry Movement provided commodities, especially to the urban poor communities.

On scaling up local alternative practices

Sandyawan Sumardi, recognizing Sisto's presentation, recalled the question regarding self-reliance amid the call for solidarity movements to hold governments accountable. Noting the situation in Indonesia, communities that undertake solidarity efforts have taken initiatives to address issues that affect communities, including "toxic narratives" that are "exploiting political polarization," especially on social media. As such, using every platform available,

including newspapers, radio, and television, is important for movements to raise awareness of their initiatives.

Thippawan Mokpa shares her experience with the HealthNet Foundation in Thailand. As a nongovernment organization, HealthNet has had to solicit funds from the local community government. They also work with community leaders and families in their areas. They establish solidarity actions and collaborations with communities through meetings, leadership training workshops, and collaborations with marginalized sectors (for example, people with HIV/AIDS).

Dr. Benjamin Quiñones noted that being “creative, consistent, persistent” in collaborating with communities might push the local government and its agencies to become responsible to their constituents.

Teera Watcharapraanee remarked how the people have to be informed by their own experiences and the experiences of other countries in facing the COVID-19 pandemic. In November 2021, Germany was experiencing the fourth wave of coronavirus outbreaks, so Thailand instead opted to focus on economic recovery by trading off the need to sustain an efficient health system. Teera points out that “health is important.” Noting that merely waiting for the government to fix its bureaucratic structures would not help address the pandemic, Stop Drink Network conducted workshops on how to prepare for the next pandemic. This is aligned to the needs of organizations and local communities. Teera also recognizes the importance of running community kitchens and relying on the abilities of the volunteers.

Marivic Atacador discussed how Bantay Kalusugan Pampamayanan (BKP) has established a community clinic that provides medical needs to people who cannot access a nearby hospital. BKP has established its own volunteer-managed community, reflecting the organization’s belief in the active participation of people. The organization continues to work hard in fulfilling its objectives

Reflecting on how Asosisau HAK has dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic in Timor-Leste, **Sisto Dos Santos** stresses how the

government must belong to the people, and the people must hold the state accountable. Sisto stresses the importance of civil society's efforts to mobilize people to reconfigure the way the state, international agencies, and international networks function. Sisto called for the establishment of an international network that deals with holding governments accountable for their responsibilities to their constituents and providing for their needs, especially food, water, and medicine. This network also has to promote social, cultural, and psychological sustainability.

Cheska, a community organizer in the Philippines, has talked to two individuals, a person belonging to the urban poor and a farmer. Through ten months of organizing communities, Cheska stressed the importance of addressing health in the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the community has engaged in cleaning drives and participating in discussions on how to treat COVID-19 patients and take care of their health, how vaccines work, and how to pay attention to mental health. These efforts are important, especially for communities locked down by mobility restrictions, the loss of jobs and financial opportunities.

Concrete cases of communities working together

The following are the cases of communities working together in exemplifying crossborder solidarity:

- In Thailand, they established a community kitchen to address the food shortage among the urban poor and poorest families in Bangkok.
- The use of public media in raising awareness to fight disinformation through audio drama and radio spots.
- In Indonesia, “Patungan Rakyat” or Citizens Help Citizens initiated a movement to provide assistance such as food to the poorest.

- In the Philippines, a Community Pantry was popularized so that anyone can contribute and people can take what they need.

The gender perspective: Emphasizing women's health and welfare

Dr. Benjamin Quiñones emphasized the importance of monitoring the health of mothers and their children. Doing so is important in sustaining the pursuit of better health among members of the community.

Lucky E. Dela Rosa, a documenter in this workshop, discussed his experience in a foundation that aims to provide information among children. He points out the importance of paying attention to early childhood education. Children's brains develop from 0 to 8 years old, and it is important to focus on these ages so that their learnings would be useful to society in the long term. It is also important to recognize the connection between mothers' and children's health, especially as mothers provide food and nutrition to their children.

Marivic Atacador stressed the importance of focusing on mothers and the youth, recognizing the lack of benefits that mothers receive from the government. Mothers are deemed *ilaw ng tahanan* (light of the household), and they are significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of the need to provide food and medicine to the household by allocating budget amid the loss of jobs. Mothers also have to deal with the burden of thinking about the way their household sustains their needs.

Demands, calls, and collective actions

The third workshop session generated these demands and calls:

- 1.) While promoting people's initiatives, we need to make the government accountable.
- 2.) It is the responsibility of the people to show the government that social protection measures are their responsibility.

The following collective actions were proposed in this panel:

- 1.) The people are the government, and they have the power to push for propeople policies that will essentially address the problems faced by the urban poor and the general population.
- 2.) “Struggle as hard as we can, surrendering to death to the Eternal Light is the oxygen of life that will surely make us able to continue to breathe full of life, even though the body is getting weaker, even to the point of death!” - Sandyawan Sumardi, Director, Ciliwung Merdeka, Indonesia

WORKSHOP 4

Diverse forms of crossborder solidarity during the pandemic

Presenters: Ashish Kothari and Johnson Yeung

Reactors: Touch Sophort and Khaing Zar Aung

Moderators: Suntaree H. Saeng-ging (Homenet Thailand) and Benjamin Velasco (UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies–Program on Alternative Development, Philippines)

The fourth parallel workshop session discussed the way organizations in Asia have focused on establishing crossborder solidarity in different countries. Although social restrictions and political repression during the coronavirus pandemic affect the way organizations provide assistance and service to national communities, these organizations continue to establish advocacies for members of the community. They are founded on the principles of social cohesion, cooperation, sharing, and caring to ensure that there are adequate solutions to problems exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These actions also hold governments accountable for their shortcomings in satisfying the needs of communities and respecting their rights.

Presentation 1

Community Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ashish Kothari

Member, Vikalp Sangam (India)

Ashish Kothari presented on community resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. He talked about how the global crisis is generated by the current system, whether this is capitalism, patriarchy, or state dominance. This crisis has affected everyone, especially the vulnerable. He notes how many governments have used the pandemic to be more totalitarian, while corporations have used it to generate more profit. He then poses the question of whether there are alternatives to meet human needs and aspirations without causing the same amount of social havoc. He highlighted resistance—saying “no” to the current system and the fundamental structures that cause oppression and inequality. He emphasized that there are alternative ways of being, knowing, and doing.

Ashish shared the story of the empowerment of *dalit* (untouchable caste) women farmers who were able to move towards food security and sovereignty, secure land rights, and establish community grain banks because of their collective efforts. Ashish mentioned that they were the least affected by the pandemic because they have their own community-based system. He also shared the experiences of Maha Gram Sabha, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, India. Maha Gram Sabha calls to stop mining, have sustainable livelihoods, and advocate forest rights and conservation, local governance, and self-determination. Their slogan is “While we elect the government in New Delhi, in our village, we are the government.”

Ashish also discussed “radical ecological democracy,” which is essentially about going to the roots and challenging conventions. It talks about looking into one’s own lifestyle and expanding this responsibility to other species. In other words, “radical ecological democracy” entails ecologically sensitivity.

In essence, Ashish tackled the importance of sustaining or rebuilding community spirit while also addressing traditional inequalities. He highlighted the importance of direct democracy, localized self-reliance, and responsibility towards the ecosystem by challenging capitalism and demanding state accountability.

Presentation 2

The Milk Tea Alliance

Johnson Yeung

Milk Tea Alliance

The second presentation was led by Johnson Yeung, an organizer of the Milk Tea Alliance. The Milk Tea Alliance is a transnational alliance with a growing membership since April 2020. It began after a “meme war” happened between Chinese trolls and netizens from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Thailand. Unlike other organizations, the Milk Tea Alliance has many leaders doing organizing work, facilitating meetings, and helping curate campaigns. The alliance is decentralized and has no hierarchy. It has no secretary-generals or convenors. They are glued by their shared values of human rights, democracy, equality, and standing against authoritarianism.

Johnson pointed out that decentralized grassroots movements like the Milk Tea Alliance are more essential now. Traditionally, the role of civil society is to just lobby those in power. Civil society is never the center of the subject, they dictate what those in power should say and what political decisions they should make. Contrary to this, the Milk Tea Alliance does not rely on lobbying those in power. It excels at agenda setting, spreading discourses, on-the-ground organizing, documentation, and amplifying voices from the ground to compete against the elite who used to control agenda setting and political narratives. In other words, the Milk Tea Alliance is able to delegitimize the conventional structure.

Johnson also shared that the members of the Milk Tea Alliance are able to share tactics and knowledge with each other. He cited the instance wherein Hong Kong and Burmese activists translated tactics on

how to respond to police brutality and how to document the situation. Eventually, they come up with a manual, which they shared among fellow activists. The edge of the Milk Tea Alliance lies in how their power is scattered. Thus, they can exert political pressure on various actors. While the capacities of activists may seem like they are diminishing as governments try to interfere, by engaging in transnational activism, they can identify with each and share union, fellowship, and solidarity.

Reactions

Touch Sophort (Workers Information Center, Cambodia) reported on the situation of the textile industry in Cambodia, focusing on the experiences of women workers therein. She shared that there were around 1,153 factories in Cambodia in 2019, with 840,000 workers who are mostly women. The textile industry exports to the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States while investors come from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, and Japan.

The workers earned USD 190/month in 2021 and are expected to earn USD 192/month the following year. When it comes to working conditions, the workers are expected to meet double the quota while being forced to work overtime. Living conditions are also not the best; they reside in small, unhygienic, and unsafe rented rooms. Because the cost of living is high, and wages are low, workers experience poor health and rising debt. Their situation deteriorated during the pandemic when they lost benefits. Some workers lost their jobs, and more suffered from the increase in the cost of living.

Despite this situation, the workers are able to stand in solidarity to support each other by sharing food among workers and neighbors and lending money to each other. They were also able to campaign for the regulation of water prices for workers and students, decreasing them from 1,000–4,000 riels (USD 0.25–USD 1) per cubic meter to 800 riels (USD 0.2) per cubic meter. From then on, the Phnom Penh Water Authority, the water company in Cambodia, now takes the issue of accessible water prices more seriously.

Khaing Zar Aung, from the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar, discussed the importance of labor unions and their advocacies. Strategically, the confederation engages in banking and insurance, which have an impact on workers. Khaing, however, notes the way people tend not to understand fully the importance of labor unions. This issue, according to her, could affect grassroots organizations, especially in the context of inflation.

Open Forum

CM Fajardo: How can the youth contribute to encouraging others to engage in political conversations pertaining to dictatorship in Southeast Asian countries? Thank you so much! Maraming salamat in Tagalog.

Ashish: Young people are doing this, but much more needs to be done. The first is to be able to expose the greenwashing and whitewashing that governments do domestically and externally. We want health security, but we want it through community solidarity. There should be an envisioning of the kind of future we want as young people today. What is our vision of the future we want, and how do we think we can get there? This is apart from the mobilization, expressing your voice through art, dancing, music, and comics. Young people are so creative and there are different ways they can show [their aspirations].

Johnson: I very much agree with Ashish about following alternative media but also trying to amplify voices that are really from the people. We had an experiment at the Milk Tea Alliance to have regular checkups of what happens in their movement in their geographic location. There are news and information you can't read in international media. Move away from simplified versions of narratives about each other's movements. It is important to identify who is your friend and foe. Our definitions of democracy and human rights can differ through language or social history. Most of the young people are more tech-savvy and have more access to sources to broaden their horizons. [We] need to use

those resources so we can identify, compare, and contrast the state of movement we are living in and picture a common narrative.

Xun-Ling Au: What can those of us who are further afield (I'm in the UK) do to help support and be good allies?

Ashish: Three things are very important, and they can be done [anywhere in the world]. One is to expose their own governments' faults and human rights violations because a lot of things happening in our society arise from the actions of corporations and governments in the West, whether directly or indirectly. The second important [thing] is to look inwards: what is your consumption pattern? It was found that there is a massive ecological footprint in Scandinavia. The third is solidarity statements, demonstrating movement in the embassies of countries you support.

Khaing: We need you to reach out to the media to highlight the campaign for comprehensive economic sanctions. I see many organizations are afraid to use this wording so you can also use "all business in Myanmar leave now" because they are affecting military rule in Myanmar. Our people, the future [are] gone. There is a need to cut military income so economic sanction[s] [are] really important. Target the government and companies to demand that they cease operations in Myanmar and respect workers' rights in the country. Reach out to the media to highlight the campaign for comprehensive economic sanctions and the plight of Myanmar workers. Hand over memoranda to ASEAN embassies in your country, demanding that multinational companies with origins in ASEAN countries cease operations in the country. Interact with multinational companies and global brands from your country, demanding they cease operations in Myanmar, ensuring that workers' rights are respected. Demonstrations and press conferences at the offices of multinational companies with a presence in the country.

Touch: Seek information especially in the textile industry, and communicate with your community in the UK to raise awareness.

Marc: The dominant narratives during crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and also in post-9/11 era) that governments use is that radical, autocratic measures are needed. They ramp up fear and feelings of isolation. Thus, initiatives like this AltDev Conference—to encourage solidarity, and to surface and celebrate the creativity, humanity, and fellowship in and among the grassroots—are an important form of reclaiming or retelling a better narrative.

Rain: With the COP26 in the spotlight on the global stage, what do you think is the important relationship between climate change and the vulnerabilities of democracies of countries in the global south and Southeast Asian countries? Is there still hope for democracies and for these governments not to use climate change, pandemic policies, and so forth as a way to restrict their freedom?

Ashish: Rain, I think what Marc says is important . . . we have to define what we as civil society mean when we say “security” . . . as very different from what governments are saying. We have to assert that it is about local livelihood security, ecological security, the security of having our voices heard, the security of our basic human rights, etc. . . . not more surveillance, more military expenses, etc.

Panel 3 Workshop

Like that of Panel 2, the Panel 3 workshop focuses on the same set of questions:

- 1.) What initiatives can be undertaken to sustain and enrich these local alternative practices?
- 2.) How might we scale up these local alternative practices at the regional and national level?
- 3.) Give examples of concrete cases of communities working together across Southeast Asia which already exemplifies crossborder solidarity.

On initiatives to sustain and enrich local alternative practices

Johnson Yeung proposed a digital museum/exhibition of Southeast Asian social history and an online documentary on Southeast Asia. Universities have these museums, but they are not accessible to the public.

Ryan suggested expanding the work of Lawan in documenting cases using multimedia. Vikalp Sangam and the GTA have engaged in these efforts in documenting alternative development practices.

Alpha Mae delos Santos suggested supporting, buying, and promoting products from communities.

Regarding the collation of stories in practice, **Marc Batac** pointed out that organizations must ensure that locals and communities narrate their stories and share their knowledge as “primary experts” rather than be treated as objects of study for outside researchers and international nongovernment organizations (INGOs) who claim authorship. He agrees with **Xun-ling Au** on the importance of capacity-building to use technology or accompanying in editing/translating. But these products should be packaged as products of the community.

On scaling up local alternative practices at the national and regional levels

Ruskin Angelo Cinco proposef that organizations maximize the use of technology. Social digital movements have to train their members to use digital technology in fostering solidarity. They should have a platform and maximize it. Social media platforms have a bigger role in advocacies, especially during the pandemic. Grassroots communities can benefit from digital hubs. Finally, social movements have to scale up their presence on the internet.

Aalhiex R. Escarta says that organizations and movements can plan for inclusive cultural education programs. These programs can be implemented in schools/universities, especially with regard to indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples shall be invited to

webinars to share their own struggles and problems. They can even showcase their livelihood or their own products that can be sold online. Organizations and movements should help indigenous people in Southeast Asia, especially during the pandemic.

Xun-ling suggested finding the local projects and helping them build the capacity (time, technology, and translation). Involvement, for her, seems to be the “key” to upscaling.

Ruskin argued for cooperation between organizations within the existing networks in Southeast Asia. The Asian Solidarity Economy Coalition (ASEC) already has an online academy that focuses on solidarity economy and cooperatives. The Department of Education has to be urged to include the narratives of the indigenous peoples and local alternative practices in the books (starting from primary grade school) used in schools.

Rain called for supporting fiction books and films that depict the stories of communities. These media have to be accessible to students at the local and regional levels.

On examples of communities in Southeast Asia working together to foster crossborder solidarity

The examples provided are the Milk Tea Alliance, the Solidarity Trade Union Movement and the Democracy Movement. There are also organizing and networking efforts among people who share a similar situation in Southeast Asia, as well as a campaign for comprehensive economic sanctions in Myanmar.

Demands/Calls and Collective Actions

The workshop generated these demands and calls:

- 1.) Maximize the use of technology and social media to promote people’s movements.
- 2.) Campaign for and stand in solidarity with trade union and democracy movements.

- 3.) Encourage institutions to allow grassroots communities like indigenous peoples to speak for themselves and share their own stories.
- 4.) The workshop also proposed these collective actions:
- 5.) Share knowledge about the movements in other countries to different networks—friends, family, community
- 6.) Support products, projects, and works by and about grassroots and local communities to further recognize them and their stories.

WORKSHOP 5

Community responses in the midst of a climate emergency

Presenters: Suraphon Songruk and Veronica "Derek" Cabe

Reactors: Donald Takhell and Erwin Puhawan

Moderators: Valentin Da Costa Pinto (Fundasun Hafoun Timor Leste) and Lini Zurlia (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, Indonesia)

The 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), held in Glasgow, Scotland from October 31 to November 13, 2021, prompted the need for movements to assert the need to move away from the “capitalist capture” of the world’s natural resources and from neoliberal policies that promote an “unsustainable and precarious” model of economic development. As governments have seemed to fail to fulfill their promises for the Earth, communities have taken climate change and its impact very seriously, creating alternative practices that address this emergency amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This workshop explored how communities addressed the global crisis, focusing on their own livelihoods while also pursuing “activism against the devastating corporate-led and state-supported development projects.”

Presentation 1

Suraphon Songruk

Southern Peasants' Federation of Thailand (SPFT)

Suraphon Songruk's discussion focused on agroecology, one of the policies of the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) of Thailand. Songruk mentioned the importance of building communities and ensuring food sovereignty. Communities have practiced collective land management and agroecology for food production. This practice also helps rehabilitate the land that has been used for palm oil plantations over the last few decades.

Suraphon acknowledged the impact of climate change (and of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020). Having food production systems have helped communities prepared for such situations. However, climate change has also significantly affected weather patterns, which also impacts food production.

Agroecology has helped mitigate the effects of changing weather patterns, unlike monoculture (e.g., rubber and palm oil plantations). It also helped communities in Thailand stay healthy amid problems such as the pandemic.

Suraphon also recognizes the role that women play in agroecology. Aside from producing food for families, women also contribute to labor on collective farms. This way, they help communities generate income. For Suraphon, "Women have a key role in protecting seeds and in promoting food production." This way, communities free themselves from large agricultural industries, ensuring their independence from corporate control over their food systems, since corporate control negatively affects the ecosystem. Women are thus important in ensuring food sovereignty amid crises.

Presentation 2

Veronica “Derek” Cabe

Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement; Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya–Bataan (Philippines)

Veronica “Derek” Cabe’s discussion focused on the impact of coal plants in Bataan, a province in Central Luzon, Philippines. In 1985, the people of the province launched a general strike against the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP), a project spearheaded by dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos. There have been attempts to revive the BNPP, but the opposition of the local government unit (LGU) of the province and of the people of Bataan have rendered these attempts futile.

The local government of Bataan, despite opposing nuclear power plants, has supported coal plants. Five coal plants are operating in the province, and the people ask, “For whom are these energy plants?” They have noticed that these power plants have benefited not residents but corporations. These power plants have displaced people. For Derek, these coal plants “are all part of the neoliberal project by the government; these are all for business, all for profit.”

Derek noted the initiatives of the Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement in Bataan. The movement first organized communities so that they can defend their rights from the impacts of coal power plants. Communities have formed different organizations, and the Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement have provided educational discussions to capacitate communities. The youth and community leaders have organizations so they can develop skills in lobbying measures and protecting their rights. The Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement has also encouraged communities to tell their stories about the negative impact of coal plants on their lives. They gather data that serve as evidence for lobbying measures for the local government’s approval.

The Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement in Bataan has noted that coal plants in the province have generated 284 tons of ash. The organization has filed a complaint to the Bureau of Fisheries, which discovered chromium, cadmium, and mercury contamination among

fishes in the coastal areas. The Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement has been seeking accountability through collective actions. However, the government, which explicitly supports the operations of coal plants, dismisses their complaints as “isolated” and the movement as a “nuisance.” The Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement of Bataan has conducted evidence-gathering for three years. Their actions have led the government to create a task force that investigates the impact of coal plants on the environment.

The Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement has also met people whose health and livelihood have been significantly affected by coal plants. They also assist communities in lodging legal recourses, including complaints and petitions to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) against the actions of big businesses. The movement also expresses its solidarity with many more organizations and movements that can help amplify the struggles of the people of Bataan.

Before understanding the larger reality of climate change, the people of Bataan had already experienced firsthand the impact of coal plants on their communities. They have also provided relief to communities, conducted clean-up drives on coastal areas, and planted mangroves. They have also held art exhibits and other initiatives in local communities.

The Coal- and Nuclear-Free Movement Bataan has also been affected by human rights violations under the Duterte regime. One of their members, Ate Gloria Capitan, became one of the first victims of extrajudicial killings. Recalling what Capitan said during the interview, Derek says that her actions are “not just for her but for her grandchildren,” and shows how her actions impact communities and future generations.

Reactions

Donald Takhell (All Loktak Lake Area Fishers’ Association Manipur [ALLAFUM], India) recalls his experience in Manipur, India. Instead of coal plants, Manipur relies on hydroelectric projects. Laws concerning the operation of these projects in Manipur,

according to Donald, do not account for “local culture, indigenous knowledge, and local fishing grounds.” Pollution has significantly degraded the Loktak Lake’s water quality, and warm weather in November has resulted in fish kills. Donald’s organization has started engaging in alternative agriculture, as well as advocating for fishers’ rights.

Erwin Puhawan discusses how the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice was formed in light of forwarding climate justice as a solution to the climate crisis. According to Erwin, 150 organizations, networks, and alliances representing grassroots communities form part of the movement. When the Philippines was put under one of the longest lockdowns in Southeast Asia, local communities continued resisting the construction of power plants. One of the cases where local communities succeeded is in La Union, whose government stopped the construction of a coal power plant. Local communities and tourists have campaigned against coal power plants (which generate 5,700 MW of energy). The communities have also convinced 16 municipalities to “issue a coal-free revolution.” While coal power plants have been resisted by the community, fossil fuels continue to threaten biodiversity hotspots. He hopes that people consider their alternatives.

Open Forum

Lini: We do have an alternative to dirty energy. But governments do not listen to us. So this regional solidarity is very important so that governments will listen to the people. May we now open the floor for some questions, comments, and reactions.

On community responses to issues

Derek: Most of the time, the government [delegitimizes] our positions by saying that we are not experts. So, we also capacitate ourselves in the field of science because our experiences are valid, and our experiences have made us experts, and governments should recognize that.

Lini: Thank you for that important point, Derek. The communities that experience these problems firsthand are very much experts on their own issues.

Suraphon: The government is exerting a lot of pressure on a lot of communities. But these fishers are part of the ecosystem, and these lands are their territories.

On indigenous peoples

Lini: The government sees these indigenous people as criminals. These are horrible situations.

Donald: We would like the government to rethink what IP territories mean. And we are trying to build capacities, advocate human rights, and give histories about these communities. We are trying to document our figures and data. And like what Derek said, the government sees us as a nuisance and antidevelopment [but] these developments have done nothing for us and are only for big business and corporations.

On COP26

Lini: I am just wondering what is happening in our region with this neoliberal agenda with its false solutions in Glasgow. How do you think these solutions will impact our struggle? Can these provide a small hope without problems? How do we see the COP26?

Erwin: So the COP26 is more of the “blah blah blah blah,” as Greta Thunberg says. What can words do without action? These are all negotiations, and most of them are in the business sector. The governments are not serious about it. And in terms of interest, it’s us who are affected. It’s still up to us, to the communities, to lead the way because if they are really serious about solving climate change, they should have done a lot in the past.

Workshop

The workshop focused on these three guiding questions:

- 1.) What initiatives can be undertaken to sustain and enrich these local alternative practices?
- 2.) How might we scale up these local alternative practices at the national and regional level?
- 3.) Give examples of concrete cases of communities working together across Southeast Asia which already exemplifies cross-border solidarity.

On initiatives to sustain and promote local alternative practices and on scaling up local alternative practices

Erwin argued that organizations and movements should promote activities and forums to help them engage with, and learn from, each other. Erwin adds that people should promote alternative regionalism given the regional and international character of social issues. They must also share ideas regarding the promotion of local alternatives.

Suraphon asserts the importance of a global network that helps connect people who look for fellow individuals and groups that can help amplify their calls.

Agreeing with Erwin's and Salam's points, **Derek** pointed out how some communities need skills that other communities may have. Networks help communities share competencies and address gaps between them. A regional solidarity network also helps address issues regarding access to organizations with common struggles. Exchanges of referrals can also help in mounting campaigns, especially with the lack of networks among some organizations.

Donald also agrees with the importance of holding solidarity forums for particular issues. Given the tendency to lump issues together, Donald recognizes the need to consider nuances in describing these issues. However, while there are similarities in these matters, it is important to “clap different branches together.”

Concrete examples of crossborder solidarity among communities

Donald's organization All Loktak Lake Area Fishers' Association Manipur is a federation of fishers in different wetland areas/lakes.

Derek shares how their experience of repression (especially of Ate Gloria Capitan's case) led them to reach out to the United Nations (UN). Despite the lack of access that Derek's organization has to the UN, they were able to engage in solidarity work to connect to international organizations that can help amplify their struggle. These efforts are well-appreciated, for being in a global network helped them give them a sense of safety.

Erwin narrated his experiences with stopping proposed power plants in Pangasinan and Quezon. The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, by partnering with organizations from Southeast Asia and South Korea, has pressured the South Korean government to stop financing the power plant. In addition, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, with the help of partner organizations in Ireland, was able to stop the Irish government from sponsoring a power plant in Quezon.

Demands, calls, and proposed collective action

The workshop generated these demands and calls:

- 1.) Agroecology will solve the problems of food production and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- 2.) Protect and respect the rights of indigenous people to land and life.

- 3.) Planet and people over profit.
- 4.) The workshop also proposed collective action: promote national/regional activities and forums that will enable grassroots and local organizations to share ideas and alternatives and amplify their struggles.

Synthesis

The presenters and the reactors presented their message to intergovernmental organizations and national organizations.

Derek Cabe: My message to the intergovernmental organizations and the national organizations is that the climate crisis is already here, and we are already experiencing its impacts. And it is the marginalized communities who are taking the brunt of these effects. People die, properties are destroyed, and our source of food is threatened. If we do not listen to the people who are experiencing these difficulties right now, we are missing the point of negotiations. We do not need promises; we do not need more talks; we need drastic actions. And to the people of the world, we are here, and we always believe that our collective action can make a difference and change the system that is causing us our problems. In solidarity, we are one with you.

Suraphon Songruk: I think what we need to do is to identify the common issues that we should be campaigning on together. Aside from climate and food sovereignty, we need to think about our human rights and the rights of nature. We need to codify these rights and speed up our campaigns about this. Many governments in Southeast Asia are fascist governments; people are being killed. So we need to think about how to resist these governments and the capital that destroy our communities and our environments. I believe that many communities are resisting. It is a statement for the government to stop controlling our lives and our communities, and for us to determine our own futures.

Donald Takhell: I don't pay for the oxygen that I breathe, so when I get thirsty, I should not pay for water. Water now is already a commodity. What I would like to put out as a message for governments and the international community is that we should not commodify our environment.

Erwin Puhawan: There are a lot of things that sometimes we don't agree with, but there are a thousand ways that we could unite. And that [disagreement] is what authoritarian governments love [sic]. We need to reclaim our power. The people united will never be defeated.

THIRD DAY

13 November 2021

Jose Monfred Sy (University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies [UP CIDS]) and Gino Lim Lopez (Milk Tea Alliance, Philippines) served as facilitators for this day's session. This session began with a synthesis of the insights generated from the five parallel workshops, highlighting their initiatives, plans, and manifestations of crossborder solidarity. Dr. Ed Tadem, Bae Merlina Dumotan, and Chi Suwichan served as speakers.

Presentation 1

The Role of Culture and the Arts in the Making of Southeast Asian Histories

Dr. Eduardo Tadem

University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Dr. Eduardo Tadem's discussion pertained to the role of the culture and the arts in Southeast Asian history. He provided an overview of precolonial Southeast Asian history, asserting that Southeast Asian societies are not "merely copies" of Indian and Chinese civilizations, despite the entry of religions and practices from these areas. Even before the entry of Indian and Chinese influences, the people of Southeast Asia already had established cultures. As such, Southeast Asian societies have the right to be treated as "culturally independent units" instead of being deemed "little Chinas" or "little Indias."

Many scholars have paid attention to the indigenous practices that exist within Southeast Asia. Cultural practices and traditions have been existing even before the entry of Chinese and Indian influences. In addition, such influences have been adapted and transformed to fit the Southeast Asian context. These adaptations and transformations, therefore, give these influences a distinctly Southeast Asian character. Ed cites an example in Southeast Asia—the rejection of the Hindu caste system.

Aside from the adaptation of Chinese and Indian influences, scholars have also noted similarities among Southeast Asian societies. Southeast Asian societies consider the nuclear family as more important than the extended family (compared to India, which emphasizes the opposite); treat women as important (unlike India and China); and recognize the linkages between and among the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of life.

The role of women in precolonial Southeast Asia

Compared to their counterparts in East and South Asia, women in Southeast Asia have a “relatively favorable position.” In precolonial Southeast Asian society, there was a “relatively high female autonomy, leadership, and economic importance.” The following are the roles that women have played during that period.

1. Women dominated trading, marketing, and commercial activities and transactions. Traders from India and China were surprised to find out that they were dealing with women instead of men.
2. Women became envoys and diplomats in peacemaking negotiations.
3. Women were warriors, serving as the king’s bodyguards. According to one scholar, the king did not trust men to serve as his close-in security.
4. Women played an essential role in agriculture and indigenous rituals.

5. Women contributed to dance, music, drama, and poetry in the community.
6. Women had high literacy rates in precolonial scripts, much to the surprise of early European scholars.
7. There were female rulers and monarchs in Southeast Asia.

There is also a crosscultural history of transgender people in Southeast Asia. In precolonial Southeast Asia, they played important roles in society. People who had an identity beyond being male and female held higher ritual powers. Since transgender people were “neither completely male nor female,” they were considered “closer to the gods” and thus became effective mediators between humanity and the divine. The following are examples of transgender identities in Southeast Asia:

1. The *bugis bissu* of Sulawesi, an order of spiritual leaders, who are often framed as priests or shamans
2. The *sida-sida* of Malaysia
3. The *iban manang* of Borneo
4. The *ngaju dayak basir* of Borneo
5. The *nat kadarw* of Burma
6. The *mentefuwaley libun* and *mentefuwaley lagey* of the Teduray in Mindanao, Philippines
7. The *kathoey* transgender tradition in Thailand, and some members of the Thai royal family before the 1800s.

Cultural art forms and civilizations in Southeast Asia

Many of the art forms and cultural practices in Southeast Asia were not derived from Indian and Chinese art. Among the popular indigenous

art forms of Southeast Asia are the *batik* textiles, the gamelan orchestra, and the *wayang* puppet theater. “Wet-rice or *padi* agriculture, metallurgy, navigation, ancestor cults, and mountain worship” are also said to have originated in Southeast Asia (Glass and Rawson 2020).

Ed presented some theories of the origins of Southeast Asian civilization. Older ones state that civilization moved from China and India to Southeast Asia. However, scholars today now argue that the people of mainland Southeast Asia have been “cultivating plants, making pottery, and working on bronze at the same time as the civilizations of the Middle East started to flourish around 3500 BCE” (Glass and Rawson 2020). Therefore, it is possible to argue that civilization spread from mainland Southeast Asia to China. Several art forms have flourished in the history of Southeast Asia:

- Cave paintings
- Wood for artistic purposes (i.e., woodcarvings)
- Metal and stone sculpture and architecture
- Metalworks using gold and silver
- Locally produced ceramics and porcelain
- Textiles such as batik, silk, and fiber cloth
- Indigenous music, dance, and song
- Oral literature, folk songs, folktales
- Age of Temple Buildings
- Sanskrit, Pali, and Jawi literature
- Vernacular literature

“The predominant themes of Southeast Asian art are religion and national history” (Glass and Rawson 2020). Religion is given a nondoctrinal treatment, focusing instead on the lives and the personalities of the gods. The lives of the gods as depicted in Southeast Asian art reflect the lives of the people—joyous and earthy yet divine. Southeast Asian art does not subscribe to the belief in creating “art for

art's sake." It does not require realistic models. Southeast Asian art also features legendary heroes to serve as inspiration for the people to live better lives.

The entry of East Asian, South Asian, and Western civilizations changed cultural traditions in Southeast Asia. The intrusion of Western-Christian and Hindu-Buddhist rules and moral values led to the development of negative views against women, gods, and transgender people. Women lost their traditional dominant role in religious rituals. Culture has then been deemed separate from the political and economic aspects of social life, and an "art for art's sake" model became dominant. Southeast Asian society became more stratified with the "demise of 'traditional democracies.'" In addition, culture became a "medium for entertainment" in modern times, and it has become disconnected from the way people live. Despite these changes, local communities still practice old values and cultural activities.

Deepening Solidarities Beyond Borders Among Southeast Asian Peoples: A Vision for Peoples' Alternative Regional Integration (2020)

Cultural alternative practices

Regarding culture and the arts, "visual artists and cultural performers have created networks through regional events that feature the value, diversity, and historical significance of Southeast Asian creative arts" (Tadem 2017). Political and economic issues that civil-society organizations raise lie at the forefront of these cultural exchanges (Tadem 2017). Though culture tends to be "overlooked" in society, culture indeed is considered important in "lending a human and spiritual face" to politics and economy (Tadem 2017). Therefore, for Ed, culture "should therefore be nurtured and developed." The following are the networks and organizations cited in Ed's presentation:

- 1.) **Asian Movement for Peoples' Peace and Progress (aMP3).** Across Southeast Asia, musicians are raising public awareness of sectoral and community issues and influencing public perception and social policy. The aMP3, a loose network of

alternative and socially engaged musicians, works together to project issues of development in Southeast Asia. Through their performances, aMP3 provides an overview of such issues and describes how much music plays a role in presenting a vision of a more just and humane future.

- 2.) **Koalisi Seni Indonesia (KSI).** The Koalisi Seni Indonesia seeks to promote the value and bring more attention to culture and arts in Indonesian society. They do this in conjunction with the youth, who can help bring more recognition to cultural work as a source of livelihood and a valuable profession in the country. Various arts and cultural projects are implemented at the regional and local levels. KSI engages national and local governments through dialogue about the role of arts and culture in social transformation.
- 3.) **Sining San Roque of the Save San Roque Alliance, Philippines.** Sining San Roque is an art-making initiative spearheaded by Sining Kadamay and the Save San Roque Alliance to reclaim people's spaces through art. The urban poor community of Sitio San Roque in Quezon City faces forceful displacement by big property developers who wish to establish a commercial and business district in the area. Facing dispossession, the residents of Sitio San Roque assert their demands, their calls, their presence, and most importantly, their right to the city by filling the walls of houses to be demolished with art for the community by the community.
- 4.) **ASEAN SOGIE Caucus' Collective Memory Project.** The Collective Memory Project aims to strengthen LGBTQ+ communities' history of struggle and to create inclusive political spaces for LGBTQ+ persons by using cultural strategies for advocacy. These are envisioned to contribute toward developing a collective memory, i.e., a group's cultural narratives "centered around a shared identity and its relationship to both an imagined common past and a vision of a common future" (Southeast Asian Queer Cultural Festival 2021). This vision demonstrates that LGBTQ+ people's lives

are authentically rooted in Southeast Asia's story and heritage. This is a systematic response to government claims that LGBTQ+ people's lives are contrary to local culture, or that our lives are influenced by dangerous Western values.

Ed concluded his speech by pointing out the importance of cultivating the positive elements of traditional and precolonial cultural ideas and values. These art forms can be useful in expressing resistance against modern structures of oppression and exploitation. The people have to engage in a cultural struggle towards social change and ecological restoration. Ed also pointed out the need to document alternative, liberative, and progressive cultural practices in grassroots communities. Finally, he asserted the importance of restoring the role of culture and the arts in society, so that it has equal standing with politics, economics, and social concerns.

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Performance

Sining ng Kabataang Lumalaban (SIKLABAN)

Sitio San Roque, Philippines

The link to the Facebook (FB) livestream at the official FB page of Lawan may be accessed at: <https://web.facebook.com/100069832179831/videos/1053080638784649/> (time stamp 1:12:18 – 1:17:25).

Presentation 2

Bae Merlina Dumotan

Tribal Leader, Panalsalan-Dagumbaan Tribal Association (PADATA), Philippines

Bae Merlina Dumotan represents the Talaandig ethnic group in Bukidnon, a province in Mindanao, Philippines. She narrated how older generations of the Talaandig experienced foreign intrusion in the province through landgrabbing. Foreigners had asked them for land for livelihood. The ancestors of the Talaandig allowed the outsiders to stay; however, they did not know that the foreigners would own, and turn their lands into, pineapple and banana plantations. The Talaandig people lost the lands that have been vital sources of livelihood. As such, their elders exhausted all means to reclaim what had been theirs.

Bae Merlina shared how the Talaandig people have lobbied the government to grant them a claim to the lands. Asserting rights over the ancestral domain of the Talaandig, she recounted how tragic events, including arrests, and murders, have happened in the pursuit of this objective. While other clans have regained their lands, they could not claim them fully because they need to pay [for legal fees arising from] the charges that were filed against them. Some had to sell their lands. The Talaandig, therefore, decided to file cases. in turn Since no one from their tribe wanted to serve as the *datu* that represents them, Bae Merlina, a woman, decided to step up and lead the struggle.

The Talaandig, even Bae Merline herself, had to face violence and legal charges. Her fellow *baes* and *datus* would stay with their community, while Bae Merlina would go to government agencies to process the land claims. Organizations and networks helped reach out to the Panalsalan-Dagumbaan Tribal Association and provided assistance in processing the claims. Bae Merlina attributes this struggle for the future generation to keep their land, culture, and lives.

Performance

Students of Lumad Bakwit School

Philippines

The link to the Facebook (FB) livestream at the official FB page of Lawan may be accessed at <https://web.facebook.com/100069832179831/videos/1053080638784649> at time stamp, 1:33:35 – 1:39:50

Presentation 3

Dr. Chi Suwichan

Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress (aMP3)

Dr. Chi Suwichan discussed the need for inclusivity in Thai society. Thai culture has been deemed “monocultural,” and this is the norm in society and the government. Indigenous cultures had to be assimilated into Thai monoculture, and this tendency makes Thai culture “exclusive.” As such, Chi argues for establishing a “truly inclusive city” that accepts different cultures.

Thailand’s approach to nation-building and nationalism, according to Chi, serves as the precursor to the development of an exclusive culture in Thailand. Siam was renamed Thailand, and the flag’s symbol changed from an elephant to an “NRK representation.” Borders were defined, and Bangkok became the nation’s capital to centralize the administration of the country. Western culture became influential, leading to the development of “Thainism” Chi presents the core problems of indigenous people in Thailand:

- 1.) They have no right to assess the national resources in local or ancestral areas.
- 2.) They have to deal with the destruction of forests.
- 3.) It is not easy to acquire Thai nationality.
- 4.) Indigenous people in Thailand face discrimination.

Chi next discussed discrimination. It emerges at these levels: perception, belief, prejudice, judgment, discrimination, and conflict. There is a relationship between discrimination in social settings and in the media on the one hand and direct or indirect violence on the other. To “dismantle and reconstruct” this discriminatory mindset, he proposes the use of 21st-century learning tools that foster critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration. The main goal would be to create an inclusive culture that is empathic, harmonizing, and leaves no one behind.

Chi recommended inviting indigenous people and Thai people from the city for a group activity. The activity shall utilize music, and is aimed at an individual’s and a community’s self-realization over identity and belonging through cultural exchange. Music and song would be used to help each group identify similarities with, and differences from, each other, which could help facilitate peaceful coexistence.

Chi concluded his presentation by saying that there is also a need for “cultural vaccines” that can protect us from discrimination and exclusivity. Music is one of the weapons to change or cure conflict and build peace in a sustainable way.

Performance

The Messenger Band

The link to the Facebook (FB) livestream at the official FB page of Lawan may be accessed at <https://web.facebook.com/100069832179831/videos/1053080638784649> at time stamp: 2:06:08 – 2:09:35.

Presentation 4 and Performances

ASEAN SOGIE Caucus

BabeL (Vietnam), JACK! (Vietnam), and Walkie Talkie (Myanmar)

BabeL

BabeL discussed the transformation of the definition of drag, from “this is drag” to “everything is drag.” Like every art form, drag emerges from a political and social context. She uses drag for activism in Vietnam as a way to express herself. Through drag, she helps people understand her perspective and the bigger picture behind every performance. As she asserts, young people in Vietnam are seemingly disconnected from queer activism. Through this art form, she is able to invite people to understand themselves, queer culture, and the notion of helping other people by embracing their own queerness. She further emphasizes the need for platforms that promote queer culture and activism. These platforms, such as conferences and events, make way for communities to thrive and bond.

JACK!

JACK! defines drag as “homemade” and “self-made” because there are no schools for drag. In turn, this means that anybody can do it. For him, it is about embracing one’s sexuality in any kind of way. There are supposed to be no rules when it comes to drag. Because of this open-minded and accepting nature, drag is a very powerful art form for political expression and activism. JACK! asserts that people have a mission to provoke society’s inner compassion. “This is where we say, ‘this is what “different” looks like.’ You do not need to like it; we’re not doing this for admirers, and we’re not doing this for fame. We are doing this to make you accept the existence of difference within our society. We can look at different people with more compassionate lenses.”

He recalls his experience of performing drag in his hometown. He states that drag is a personal journey for him to express himself. Drag is a very healing artform to adopt. Anybody can just try drag. He emphasizes how collecting queer art and not letting any project go unnoticed strengthen collective activism in the region. It will take time.

Still, Vietnam has been improving in terms of activism mainly because of the younger generation. There are still a lot of things to do.

Walkie Talkie

Walkie Talkie began by stating that drag is everything. She feels most powerful when in drag. For her, drag is inspiring and powerful. In Myanmar, only a few know about the existence of drag culture, which is artistic and political. She shared that at first, she was unable to reveal her face during performances because of the potential threats she may receive. A viral video she was featured in received a lot of attention and opened the concept of drag to the public. It is her mission to inform more people about this art form and its potential.

Open Forum

Masaki Yokohama: Selected Asian cultural elements are now being commercialized and offered as an attraction for tourists, especially from abroad, and detached from the real life of the local community. Others may be gradually dying out. What do you think of this? Would there be a way to gain them back for the real life of people?

Prof. Ed: In the modern age, culture and the arts simply became modes of entertainment. With the coming of colonialism, culture was separated from the political, economic, and social lives of the people, and became a medium for entertaining them. This is where governments have made use of tourism to further this marginalization and displacement of culture from its original role of being coequal with the political and economic aspects of society. We cannot expect the government to do something about this because tourism is a major foreign exchange earner. If we cannot rely on the government, we have to rely on the work of civil society organizations, social movements, community organizations, and the communities themselves.

Sarbeswara Sahoo: How was the caste system prevented from spreading in Southeast Asian nations? Had there been a caste system in this region, what would have been the consequences on the socioeconomic and cultural life of Southeast Asian regions?

Prof. Ed: The caste system was very rigid and oppressive. It was unacceptable in precolonial societies because class distinctions were fluid. It was more or less an egalitarian society. Over time, the egalitarian aspect of precolonial society was easily overridden, especially when Western colonialism came into the region. Feudalism and, later on, capitalism became further entrenched in Southeast Asian societies.

Galileo de Guzman Castillo (as translated by Mon Sy): Besides the continued documentation of alternative practices in culture, what other concrete step or action could be done in order to strengthen our movements and our struggles in Southeast Asia? Are there any other ideas that you would like to share in forwarding countercultural alternatives that try to change or criticize the dominant culture that we have, which is homogenizing and marginalizing, which is the culture being cultivated by ASEAN?

Prof. Ed: Documentation is simply the first step. We don't know how long it would take. We need to generate more and disseminate. The next step would be to engage in people-to-people exchanges on a cultural level, to share each other's cultural experiences, to learn from each other, to develop, to sustain, and to make improvements by taking in indigenous practices and cultures of other people. Southeast Asia has always been known for its syncretic assimilation. The important thing is the message. Cultural solidarity can only take place if these happen on the community level, elevated to the regional, national, and people-to-people levels.

Synthesis, Heroes' Tribute, and Online Protest

The Speakers and Reactors

Speakers, First Day

Dr. Maria Cynthia Banzon-Bautista is Vice President for Academic Affairs of the University of the Philippines (UP) System. She is a sociologist and former Dean of the UP College of Social Sciences and Philosophy. She also served as the chair of the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation.

Dr. Eduardo Climaco Tadem is Convenor of the Program on Alternative Development, UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies and Professor Emeritus of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman. He has a PhD in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore.

Dr. Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo represents Homenet Philippines and the former regional coordinator of Homenet Southeast Asia. She is a professor emeritus of the University of the Philippines Diliman and former Dean of the UP College of Social Work and Community Development.

Dr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram is a visiting Senior Fellow at Khazanah Research Institute in Malaysia⁵ and visiting Fellow at the Initiative for Policy Dialogue, Columbia University, and Adjunct Professor at the International Islamic University in Malaysia.

Anwar Sastro Ma'ruf is the General Secretary of the grassroots-led Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI, Confederation of Indonesian People's Movements). Sastro was a factory worker in the 1990s and became a labor union leader for approximately 23 years. He is a regular spokesperson for many Indonesian civil society coalitions, locally and internationally.

5 This is taken from the profile of Prof. Kwame Sundaram at the website of Khazanah Research Institute, https://www.krinstitute.org/Speakers-@-Jomo_Kwame_Sundaram.aspx

Dr. Cynthia Maung is a medical doctor and human rights advocate, and the founder and director of Mae Tao Clinic. Her works have received international accolades including the Roux Prize 2018, the Sydney Peace Prize 2013, the National Endowment for Democracy Award 2012, the Ramon Magsaysay Award (2002), and the UNDP's Untold Stories Award.

Agustiana is the General Secretary of the Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP, Pasundan Federation of Farmers) in Indonesia. He headed the People's Assistance Union in Java and Bali. He also serves as the Chair of the National Council of the Agrarian Reform Consortium, and the Chair of the Indonesian Peasant Movement Association.

Panelists, Second Day

Syamsudin Fujianti is from the Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA, Agrarian Renewal Consortium) of Indonesia. He cofounded the Indramayu Farmers Union (STI). Until now, he has been active in fighting for land rights for 8,000 landless farmers who live around the forest in Indramayu. These farmers are victims of criminalization by a state-owned company, Perum Perhutani.

Kassirin Phiboon is a researcher from the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation in Bangkok, Thailand. She works with small-scale farmers in promoting alternative agriculture through research and dissemination of knowledge and innovation on food security.

Thippawan Mokpa is the director of HealthNet Foundation based in Thailand.

Teera Watcharapranee is the executive director of Stop Drink Network, Thailand.

Sandyawan Sumardi of the Jaringan Relawan Kemanusiaan is the director of Ciliwung Merdeka, an NGO concerned with the urban poor residents living along the banks of Ciliwung River.

Concurrently, he is a member of the Honorary Council of the Indonesian Advocates Association, the Jakarta Academy, and the Coalition for Justice and Truth Disclosure.

Ashish Kothari is a founder of the Indian environmental group, Kalpavriksh. He has taught at the Indian Institute of Public Administration, coordinated India's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process, and served on the boards of Greenpeace International and Greenpeace India. He helps coordinate the Vikalp Sangam, Global Tapestry of Alternatives processes, and Radical Ecological Democracy network.⁶

Johnson Yeung is an organizer of the Milk Tea Alliance, Hong Kong. He is a former convener of the Civil Human Rights Front in Hong Kong. He served as Deputy General Secretary of the Federation of Students, a platform for youth engagement in social action.

Suraphon Songruk is the Coordinator of the Southern Peasants' Federation of Thailand (SPFT). SPFT is a network formed in 2008 that has been campaigning for the rights of peasants to agricultural land in Surat Thani Province and other areas in the region.

Veronica Cabe is the coordinator and community organizer of the Coal and Nuclear-Free Bataan Movement and Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya–Bataan in the Philippines (Movement for National Democracy–Bataan). She is among community members leading the campaign to hold companies like San Miguel Corporation accountable for coal plants' violations in the Philippines.

⁶ This is taken from the page "Great Transition Initiative: Toward a Transformative Vision and Praxis," available at the Great Transition Network website, <https://greattransition.org/contributor/ashish-kothari>

Reactors, Second Day

Leonardo F. Soares is a researcher focused on social and ecological subjects and works as the Technical Adviser of the UNAER-Uniaun Agrikultores Ermera (Ermera Peasants Union). He is also leading the Institutu Ekonomia Fulidaidai-Slulu Ermera (IEFS), a popular education institute based in Ermera municipality of Timor-Leste, which develops capacity-building and advocates for farmers.

Maria Jovielyn Unlayao is a student at Polytechnic University of the Philippines taking Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. A community organizer, she is the Administrative and Operations Manager of Community Pantry PH BuyAnihan; an advocate of Freedom of Information; and a former Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Council) Treasurer at Barangay Lambakin, Marilao, Bulacan, Philippines.

Fintaylan Jenevie Cornelio is one of the leaders of the Inged Fintaylan Timuay Justice Governance. ‘Fintaylan’ is a title given to a Teduray woman leader. She and members of her tribe are currently practicing the ‘Sulagad,’ the sustainable farming system of the Teduray-Lambangian indigenous communities in Mindanao, Philippines.

Sisto Dos Santos is currently the director of Asosiasaun HAK (*Hukum, hak Asasi & Keadilan*) or Association HAK (Law, Human Rights and Justice), which is the Timor Leste member of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD). He also sits as a board member of the National Alliance of Timor Leste for International Tribunal.

Marivic Atacador is currently the President of Bantay Kalusugan Pampamayanan (BKP) (Community Health Watch). BKP aims to promote the health of ordinary Filipinos through awareness initiatives, monitoring, consultations carried out in collaboration with other educational and civil society organizations.

Touch Sophort is the Communications Officer of the Worker’s Information Center (WIC) in Cambodia. The WIC is a female

garment workers-based association that focuses on building and strengthening garment workers towards accountable and legitimate leadership within the sector that responds to rights and needs of female laborers.

Khaing Zar Aung is the Treasurer of the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar and the President of the Industrial Workers' Federation of Myanmar. She is also currently involved in international solidarity work for Myanmar.

Donald Takhell represents the All Loktak Lake Area Fishers' Association Manipur (ALLAFUM) in India. He is a Research Associate of Indigenous Perspectives and has been documenting and researching the impact of COVID-19 on the fishing communities of the Loktak wetlands region.

Erwin Puhawan is the Luzon Coordinator of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice. He is also the Managing Trustee of Kanlungan Center Foundation Inc., the Board Treasurer of Lawyers Beyond Borders Philippines, and sits in the Executive Committee of Migrant Forum Asia as Southeast Asia Representative. A musician, he is a member of Soulful Band.

Presenters, Third Day

Bae Merlina Dumotan is a tribal leader of the Panalsalan-Dagumbaan Tribal Association (PADATA) and one of the female leaders of the Talaandig tribe who struggled to reclaim their ancestral lands from the powerful elites and enterprises in Maramang, Bukidnon, Philippines.

Dr. Chi Suwichan of the Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress or AMP3, is a young Karen musician who is engaged in a project linking urban and rural communities through music.

Walkie Talkie is a drag artist from Yangon, Myanmar. She has been active in the LGBTIQ movement as part of the Rainbow Alliance, a network of young activists. She was one of the featured artists during the Southeast Asian Queer Cultural Festival.

BabeL is a drag artist in Saigon, Vietnam. BabeL always looks up to creating art, doing performances that relate to Vietnamese' culture, life, and history. Her performances entail diverse content from delicious, comedy, fierce, horror, political, contemporary, and more. BabeL was one of the featured artists during the Southeast Asian Queer Cultural Festival.

JACK! is a Vietnamese drag artist and filmmaker based in Saigon. His latest self-directed short film, "Nha Hoang," tells a story of self-discovery, a journey from personal struggles and fears to the bigger impact of society on queer expressions. He was one of the featured artists during the Southeast Asian Queer Cultural Festival.

Performers

The Sining ng Kabataang Lumalaban (SIKLABAN) from Sitio San Roque is a cultural organization of youth and teenagers who are working hand-in-hand with their parents, neighbors, activists, and allied organizations to resist the demolition of their urban poor community.

The Bakwit School is a makeshift mobile school where Lumad students who are victims of militarization can continue their studies.

Messenger Band (MB), based in Cambodia, is one member of the United Sisterhood Alliance. MB collects histories and contemporary stories from farmers, sex workers, garment factory workers and landless people and uses the content of their narratives as lyrics to their songs. MB uses social research for raising awareness and advocacy through performances, cultural, arts and songs.

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Lower Ground Floor, Ang Bahay ng Alumni
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Telephone: (02) 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 4268 / (02) 8426-0955
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