

Southeast Asian Grassroots Practices Towards an Alternative Peoples' Regionalism

Convergence Space on
Alternative Regionalism

5–6 November 2020
Vietnam and Online



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
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Table of Contents

1	Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism	1
	Convergence Space Organizers	1
	Rationale of the Convergence Space	3
	Alternative Regionalism as a Convergence Space	4
	COVID-19 Pandemic and the Role of Alternatives	4
<hr/>		
2	Alternative Regionalism from the Perspective of Southeast Asian Peoples	7
	Introduction	7
	Panel 1	
	Cross-Border Solidarities	8
	Alternative Southeast Asian Peoples Regionalism and People-to-People Solidarity	8
	Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem Convenor, Program on Alternative Development UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS AltDev)	
	Cross-Border Solidarity Economy	9
	Anwar ‘Sastro’ Ma’ruf Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI)	

Cross-Border Cultural Solidarity	10
Ivanka Custodio ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC)	
Open Forum 1	12
Panel 2	
Local Cases of Alternative Practices	13
Solidarity of Women During Pandemic	13
Luu Nguyet Minh The Center for Women and Development (CWD), Vietnam	
Land Rights Assertion and Alternative Sustainable Food Production	15
Video presentations from Raul Ramos, Je-ann Repayo, and Rommel Dela Cruz Federation of Sicogon Farmers and Fisherfolk Association (FESIFFA)	
Grassroots Movement for Ecological Protection	17
Fernando Avelino Ximenes Komite Esperansa (KE) and Rehabilitacao Ecologia Nacional (RENAL)	
Open Forum 2	18

3 Strategies towards Alternative Regionalism in Southeast Asia	19
Vietnamese Group Discussion	19
On civil society organizations and people's organizations attitude	19
On expectations in engaging with ASEAN	20

On negotiating with ASEAN	20
Group 1	
Social Solidarity Economy: Pathway to Alternative Regionalism	21
Discussant: Dr. Rosalinda ‘Inday’ Pineda Ofreneo Regional Coordinator, Homenet Philippines-Southeast Asia	
On Social Solidarity Economy’s Global Expansion and Movement	22
On Distinguishing Social Solidarity Economy Initiatives Discussion, Exchanges, Manifestations	23
On Regional Organizing and Upgrading SSE Value Chains	26
On Advantage of SSE In Ecological/Environmental Campaigns	27
On Fostering Strong Local Organizing	27
On Social Solidarity Economy Practice in Indonesia	28
On Decision Making as Central Concept in SSE	29
On the Challenges of SSE	31
On Collective Self Reliance and Financing SSE (Economic Sustainability)	31
On Active Citizenship And Empowerment SSE	31
On SSE and Addressing the Mainstream and Macro	32
Group 2	
Cultural Solidarity	33
Peoples’ Strategy of Critical engagement with ASEAN	39
Discussant: Kavi Chongkittavorn, Former editor of The Nation	
Discussion, Exchanges, Manifestations	42
Plenary Discussion	45
Social Solidarity Economy	45
Cultural Solidarity	46
Peoples’ Strategy of Critical Engagement with ASEAN	46

4	Synthesis	48
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5	Resolution of ACSC/APF 2020	49
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6	Annex II	52
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	Resolution on Alternative Regional Integration for Southeast Asian Peoples	52
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Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism

*ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/
APF) 2020
5–6 November 2020
Vietnam and Online*

Convergence Space Organizers

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 - Venarica B. Papa
 - Ananeza P. Aban
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 - Micah Hanah S. Orlino
 - Ryan Joseph C. Martinez
 - Rafael Vicent V. Dimalanta

- ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC)
- Center for Women and Development (CWD), Vietnam
- Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute (KSI), Timor Leste
- Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI)
- People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
- Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL), Philippines
- Focus on the Global South

These proceedings were prepared by Junah Amor C. Delfinado¹, Rafael V. Dimalanta², and Micah O. Mangahas³.

Aside from the organizers of ACSC/APF 2020, the event would not have been possible without the support and generosity of 11.11.11⁴ and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung⁵.

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4 11.11.11 is a Belgian coalition of 60+ NGOs and 20,000 volunteers that aim to achieve global justice and eradicate exploitation.

5 Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung is a non-profit organization that promotes a critical analysis of society and fosters networks of emancipatory initiatives around Germany.

Rationale of the Convergence Space

Alternative Regionalism in Southeast Asia

Since its inception in 2005, the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) has frequently heard calls from its participants for an alternative regionalism that fundamentally deviates from the state-led and corporate-centered regionalism pursued by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These calls resulted from the growing disenchantment of civil society and peoples' movements with ASEAN policies and strategies, which have long neglected and marginalized the peoples in the region.

This sentiment is reflected in the 2016 internal ACSC/APF Ten-Year-Review, which concluded that "individual ASEAN member countries have consistently resisted and vacillated with regards civil society participation and engagement" and that the regional body has "been seen to be more comfortable with the private sector and academic and research think tanks than with civil society."

Accordingly, the 2017 ACSC/APF Statement resolved to "develop and adopt a new vision for engagement by civil society with ASEAN based on greater people to people interactions that will establish, expand and strengthen a new peoples' regional integration process based on the alternative practices of peoples, networks, and organizations across the region's societies."

Furthermore, the 2018 ACSC/APF Statement recommended that ACSC/APF "[must] undertake a collection of grassroots case studies of community-based projects on the ground of local people taking action in building an Alternative Peoples' Economy towards an Alternative Regionalism."

Finally, the 2019 ACSC/APF Statement committed the network to "undertake a process for an alternative peoples' regional integration based on the alternative practices of communities, sectors, and networks" and to "adopt the appropriate resolution related to the proposed process."

Alternative Regionalism as a Convergence Space

Created during ACSC/APF 2017, hosted by the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Philippines, convergence space is designed to provide a space to work on relevant issues, collectively discuss common struggles and alternatives, develop a common narrative for a regional campaign, and contribute to the content of the ACSC/APF final statement.

At the ACSC/APF 2020 Regional Consultation Meeting held on 22 July 2020, a proposal to create a convergence space on alternative regionalism was approved. This would enable participants to thoroughly discuss its framework, concept and practice, and re-imagine and sharpen peoples' version of regionalism—one that is grounded on alternative practices of grassroots and marginalized peoples across Southeast Asia.

The new convergence space on alternative regionalism will continue the conversations, exchanges, and unities during the ACSC/APF workshop on Alternative Regionalism (under the convergence space on “life with dignity”), as a result of a “Resolution on Alternative Regional Integration for Southeast Asian Peoples” that called for “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” which “shall lead to the establishment of a new peoples' regional integration process.”

COVID-19 Pandemic and the Role of Alternatives

The current global health crisis has demonstrated how communities, through their alternative and sustainable practices, have stood out and demonstrated their resilience in times of pandemic and other modalities of the global crisis. There are multitudes of successful people-led alternative practices in the region that deserve substantial attention and support. Some of these are sustainable farming and local food movements, land management, provision of primary health care, solidarity economy, alternative schools, arts for solidarity, and collective memory activism. As much as possible, all these practices ought to be discussed during ACSC/APF 2020.

While the alternative practices of the basic sectors and grassroots communities are proposed as the main source and crucial building blocks for a peoples' regional network, other frameworks and modes of interaction will also be raised and given proper attention. They are sharply differentiated from the existing ASEAN framework and practices that are market-oriented, state-led, corporate-centered, decimating peoples' lives and devastating the natural environment.

The objectives of the convergence space were the following:

1. To discuss alternative regionalism based on (a) the alternative practices of communities across Southeast Asia and (b) other alternative frameworks and modes
2. To generate participation of grassroots communities as alternative practitioners
3. To explore strategic actions that will strengthen the cooperation and solidarity among alternative practitioners
4. To examine COVID-19 responses at the ground level

For this convergence space, speakers from the Southeast Asian region discussed their experiences and insights on various forms of cross-border solidarities: Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem on Alternative Regionalism and People-to-People Solidarity, Anwar 'Sastro' Ma'ruf on Cross-border Solidarity Economy, Ivanka Custodio on Cross-border Cultural Solidarity, and Don Tajaroensuk and Patrawalee Thanakitpiboonpol on Cross-border Solidarity.

Grassroots formations from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Timor Leste also shared their local case of alternatives: Luu Nguyet Minh of The Center for Women and Development (CWD), Vietnam on the Solidarity of Women During Pandemic; Raul Ramos, Je-Ann Repayo, and Rommel dela Cruz of the Federation of Sicogon Farmers and Fisherfolk Association (FESIFFA), Philippines on Land Rights and Alternative Food Production; and Fernando Avelino Ximenes of the Komite Eesperansa (Committee of Hope) and Rehabilitacao Ecologia Nacional (RENAL), Timor Leste on the Grassroots Movement for Ecological Protection.

To probe and explore collective strategies on the above-mentioned forms of cross-border solidarities, Dr. Rosalinda Ofreneo of HOMENET Southeast Asia, Ryan Silverio of ASC, Bianca Martinez of Focus on the Global South, Jose Monfred Sy (Mon) of UP CIDS AltDev, and Chalida Tajaroensuk of PEF led break-out group discussions. To close the convergence space, Assistant Professor Venarica Papa of UP CIDS AltDev synthesized the valuable insights and points raised by each group in the plenary discussion and led the group in the deliberation of the convergence space resolution.

Alternative Regionalism

from the Perspective of Southeast Asian Peoples

*Workshop 12, Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism,
ACSC/APF 2020
5 November 2020, 1:30-3:30 PM (Hanoi Time)*

Introduction

Moderators, Raquel Castillo of SPELL and Jemi Irwansyah of KPRI, opened the workshop by briefly explaining the rationale behind the convergence space and its importance in bringing forward the continuing efforts of different civil society organizations in Southeast Asia to forge an alternative peoples' regionalism rooted in solidarity.

For this workshop, speakers from the Southeast Asian region discussed their experiences and insights on various forms of cross-border solidarities: Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem on Alternative Regionalism and People-to-People Solidarity, Anwar 'Sastro' Ma'ruf on Cross-border Solidarity Economy, Ivanka Custodio on Cross-border Cultural Solidarity, and Don Tajaroensuk and Pattrawalee Thanakitpiboonpol on Cross-border Solidarity.

Grassroots formations from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Timor Leste also shared their local case of alternatives: Luu Nguyet Minh of The Center for Women and Development (CWD), Vietnam discussed the solidarity efforts of their women's group during the pandemic. Je-Ann Repayo, Raul Ramos, and Rommel dela Cruz

of the Federation of Sicogon Farmers and Fisherfolk Association (FESIFFA), Philippines shared their experiences with land rights assertion and alternative food production. Fernando Avelino Ximenes of the Komite Eesperansa (Committee of Hope) and Rehabilitacao Ecologia Nacional (RENAL), Timor Leste elucidated on their grassroots movement for ecological protection.

Panel 1

Cross-Border Solidarities

Alternative Southeast Asian Peoples Regionalism and People-to-People Solidarity

■ **Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem**

Convenor, Program on Alternative Development

UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS AltDev)

Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem started his presentation by reflecting on the past efforts of ASEAN civil society for grassroots participation and engagement. He then expounded on the misanthropic response of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to these.

According to Dr. Tadem, despite civil society's engagement with the ASEAN official process since 2005, the ASEAN body and its member states have largely ignored the statements and recommendations that reflect the peoples' concerns. He asserted that the years of critical engagement with ASEAN has not significantly improved the lives of Southeast Asian peoples because of its callousness to the calls and issues raised by the marginalized peoples in the region.

He explained that the problem lies in the orientation and regional integration model of ASEAN, which is based on state-to-state relations and purely market-oriented interactions. These promote policies of deregulation, privatization, state and corporate-led trade and investment which, in turn, breed and continue economic, social, and environmental inequalities and crises. He posited that ASEAN cannot radically transform itself and argued the need for an alternative: a peoples' regionalism rooted in greater people-to-people interactions and alternative—practices at the grassroots and community levels.

Alternative Regionalism, he further argued, is not a new concept in the history of ACSC/APF. Its key elements have been around even before the inception of ASEAN. “Social movements have already been engaged in non-mainstream practices that are political, economic, social, and cultural that address the needs of the poor,” explained Dr. Tadem. Likewise, UP CIDS AltDev has carried forward with initiating this new peoples’ regional integration process.

With this, he presented the following steps necessary in building a regional integration model forged to meet the needs of the marginalized: identifying alternative practices at the ground level (political, economic, social, and cultural); documentation of these practices using participatory methods; linking these practices together in conferences and other gatherings; and holding people-to-people exchanges. In his concluding statement, he emphasized the need to bring the practitioners of these alternative practices together, learn from each other and explore cross-border exchanges where cross-border solidarity, sharing, and cooperation may be nurtured and continuously strengthened.

Cross-Border Solidarity Economy

■ **Anwar ‘Sastro’ Ma’ruf**

Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI)

For his presentation, Anwar ‘Sastro’ Ma’ruf started by arguing that the region of Southeast Asia is abundant in natural resources. Because of centuries-old foreign intervention and elite domination in its politics, its people are still living in abject poverty. “The [ASEAN] region is free from colonialism but we [the people] are not truly free. There is injustice and inequality, whether social, cultural, or economic. Countries in the region are still poor and are in control of a few ruling elites which maintain this inequality,” he explained.

With this established, he proceeded to discuss solidarity economy and its present-day examples in Indonesia. Solidarity Economy, he explained, is an alternative to the capitalist mode of production, and other elite-led, authoritarian, and state-dominated economic systems. It is a system in which ordinary people can play an active role in shaping all dimensions of human life, as it aims to link the public, private, and third/civic sector. According to him, the solidarity economy exists in all facets of the economy—from production, finance, distribution, exchange,

and governance. While aiming for a systemic transformation that will dismantle the existing structures of oppression, solidarity economy can incorporate the best practices (e.g. technology, knowledge, methods) present from the current economic arrangements to better serve the interests of the people.

To provide concrete examples, Sastro presented different initiatives that demonstrate the principles of solidarity economy: community/public kitchens, collective urban farming, and people's library, among others. He argued that the collaboration and joint venture projects of marginalized peoples are already pilot models from which a solidarity economy can flourish and develop.

Sastro also shared about *Kooperasi*, an economic organization in Indonesia that is owned and operated by people with a common interest. It is characterized by having an open and voluntary membership, democratic organizational structure/management, free and autonomous organization agency. It also allows the wider participation of members in the economy, and provides opportunities for continuing their education and training. According to Sastro, at the ASEAN level, *Kooperasi* could function as a distribution center that can connect community businesses to different consumers. Eventually, it can also operate as a funding center, particularly financing education for the grassroots.

Cross-Border Cultural Solidarity

■ **Ivanka Custodio**

ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC)

Ivanka Custodio of ASC, shed light on the production of culture and the peoples' involvement in its shaping. Culture, she explained, molds the behavior and beliefs of people. On the other hand, it is also shaped by greater political, economic, social, and legal structures and systems. Culture does not simply mean "entertainment" but also how people give meanings to different things—an intervention in the process of meaning-making.

While dominant institutions and players hold control on what culture is propagated and supplied, people can also wield power to re-shape culture. She pointed out that unconscious as people may be, in their everyday routine, they are already engaging in the re-production of culture. "Culture itself is a site of

politics and struggle,” she explained. As Ivanka argued, culture can be a ground for resistance and solidarity—people can harness the power of their collective strength and wield the political potential of culture in transforming the greater structures and systems that do not serve the people. For ASC, she pointed out that cultural solidarity is built through remembering, reclaiming, and rewriting collective memory as cultural narratives centered around a shared identity and its relationship to an imagined common past and a vision for a common future.

“Culture can also be a tool for resistance, building on the plurality of Southeast Asian Culture, particularly cultures of resistance in countering this hegemony,” said Ivanka. Positioning cultural solidarity in the context of Southeast Asia, she added, “Cultural Solidarity amongst Southeast Asian peoples is a practice of transnational civil society to counter neoliberalism.” They explained that the ASEAN model of regionalism erases the practices of solidarity existing in the region by imposing a hegemonic and prescriptive culture. Further, the collective memory propagated by ASEAN and its member states contradict that of the Southeast Asian peoples, being far removed from their lived realities, most especially those of the marginalized.

Ivanka, towards the end of her sharing, highlighted the importance of building inter-movement solidarities with other marginalized sectors (e.g. women, workers, and indigenous peoples) as it would eventually translate to cross-border solidarity with other social movements. In her concluding statement, she exclaimed, “The LGBTQIA+ has long been part of [the] Southeast Asian region even before the establishment of ASEAN; we, the people of Southeast Asia, are already practicing a culture of respect and diversity, and stands in solidarity [with others].”

Open Forum 1

After the discussions, Raquel Castillo immediately opened the floor for the open forum. Due to technical difficulties, only one question was allowed to be asked.

Question: With regard to cultural solidarity in Southeast Asia, do you consider resolving tension between nations? How is the idea to resolve cultural tensions viewed among peoples in ASEAN countries?

Ivanka agreed that there are a multitude of issues that need to be resolved among the marginalized within ASEAN. In their response, they emphasized the role of solidarity in lifting up the voices of the most marginalized. “It is crucial for us to stand with the marginalized and ensure their voices are being heard. [It is also important] that they have a seat at the table when issues central to them are being discussed,” she said.

Dr. Tadem, echoing the answer of Ivanka, explained the vast diversity of Southeast Asia and the existence of hundreds of ethnic peoples in the region, with some having existing tensions and problems with other ethnic and non-ethnic peoples. He then shared the exemplary initiative of the Ayta Magindi in Porac, Pampanga in the Philippines to resolve issues with non-ethnic peoples. During the first wave of COVID-19 in the country, these non-ethnic peoples falsely spread rumors about the Ayta Mag-indi being the carriers of the virus, because wild animals, including bats, are part of their diet and food intake. The leaders of the Ayta Mag-indi went down to converse with the non-ethnic peoples and succeeded in educating them, ending the latter’s biases against the indigenous peoples.

Due to unforeseen challenges with network signal, internet connection and other technical difficulties, Pattrawalee Thanakitpiboonpol and other grassroots partners from Thailand were not able to completely share their experiences on cross-border political solidarity. As such, before ending the open forum, Pattrawalee had been given the floor to discuss succinctly the struggle for democracy currently being waged by the peoples of Thailand.

Following the military coup, led by the current Prime Minister Prayuth in 2014, which granted the Thailand elite unprecedented powers in the Parliament, civil

unrest has grown steadily in the country. Together with the recent dissolution of the opposing political parties, huge protests sparked, blatantly stifling democracy in Thailand. Then, capitalizing on the COVID-19 pandemic, the Thailand government and military junta also declared a State of Emergency that allowed more brutal dispersal of protestors, further suppressing the people through violence and intimidation.

Nevertheless, despite the threat of prison, the emergency decree, and the onslaught of arrest of protest leaders, the movement has not been deterred and has grown stronger with other sectors joining. According to Patrawalee, the movement has three demands: the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth, a new constitution, and reformation of the Thailand monarchy.

Panel 2

Local Cases of Alternative Practices

Solidarity of Women During Pandemic

■ **Luu Nguyet Minh**

The Center for Women and Development (CWD), Vietnam

Luu Nguyet Minh of The Center for Women and Development (CWD) explained the role of CWD in supporting the comprehensive development of Vietnamese women and children in communities, especially the disadvantaged. According to her, CWD supports businesswomen, undertakes studies related to gender and women's issues for research and policy-making, and provides training and counseling to women and accommodation, if necessary.

With the rising cases of gender-based violence (GBV), CWD has established the Peace House Shelter (PHS) project that aimed to provide holistic support to GBV victims, particularly women and children who are fleeing from human trafficking, domestic violence, and in some cases, sexual abuse. Since the establishment of the PHS project in 2007, the number of shelters has increased and can be found in three locations throughout the country (Hanoi, Can Tho, and some along the Mekong Delta).

According to her, PHS follows a strict ethical code and uses a rights-based approach wherein they put their clients, women, and children, at the center of provision to support services. In the PHS model, CWD has three levels of support categorization based on the needs of victims. Depending on the degree of needs (i. e., urgent, short-term, and long-term), provision of basic personal needs, physical and mental health care, accommodation, legal aid, reintegration support, financial support, education support, career orientation, job placement, and family support may be given.

Since the pandemic hit Vietnam in 2020, the country has experienced a surge in GBV against women and children. “The women and children being housed in the shelters increased by 80% after COVID-19,” she added. Additionally, PHS found out that most of these new clients are in a financial bind, have lost their jobs, and as a result, have been emotionally unstable.

Despite the availability of such a program, Luu Nguyet Minh explained the different barriers that hinder the provision of support to GBV victims: economic dependence on abusers, divorce process, housework, child and elderly care, silence, victim blaming and discrimination. She also emphasized that although there are multiple policies for the prevention and response to GBV, they have not been properly implemented due to the lack of resources and the lack of coordination with local authorities and related agencies.

Luu Nguyet Minh ended her sharing by presenting the following recommendations for CSOs: encourage local authorities for area support to GBV-related concerns, share practices on GBV intervention especially during the pandemic, ensure working hotlines for both international and regional connection, and strengthen the regional response for GBV emergencies and crises.

Land Rights Assertion and Alternative Sustainable Food Production

■ **Video presentations from Raul Ramos, Je-ann Repayo, and Rommel Dela Cruz**

Federation of Sicogon Farmers and Fisherfolk Association (FESIFFA)

Despite the threats of eviction and dispossession from their community, the people of Sicogon Island in Northern Iloilo have been struggling to defend their rights. Elucidating the roots of their struggle, Raul Ramos, President of FESIFFA, said: “*Kami ay nakipaglaban dito sa buong isla ng Sicogon na pinangungunahan ng Federation of Sicogon Farmers and Fisherfolk Association (FESIFFA) sa mga karapatan namin dahil sa mga development na ginagawa dito sa isla ng Sicogon na gawin itong tourist destination sa pangunguna ng Ayala Land Inc. at the Sicogon Development Corporation (SIDEKO)* [We, the residents here across the entire island of Sicogon, led by the Federation of Sicogon Farmers and Fisherfolk Association (FESIFFA), are fighting to assert our rights against the developments taking place on the island. These developments aim to turn Sicogon into a tourist destination, spearheaded by Ayala Land Inc. and the Sicogon Development Corporation (SIDEKO)].”

Since 2003, the island has been placed under the Department of Agrarian Reform’s (DAR) Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), resulting in the processing of the Sicogon farmers’ land claims. However, after Super Typhoon Yolanda (international name Haiyan) made landfall in 2013 and swept the Visayas islands, including Sicogon, the people of the island experienced greater hardships and were put in severe precarity and hunger. They experienced strong winds, rain, and ocean waves that ravaged their homes, fields, crops, and boats. According to Je-ann Repayo of FESIFFA, the people of Sicogon have not received any support despite the apparent humanitarian crisis because of a blockade on humanitarian aid imposed by Ayala and SIDEKO. “*Walang tulong na dumating sa amin kasi hinarang ng Ayala at SIDEKO. Kasi ‘no man’s land’ daw itong Sicogon island. Kaya wala po kaming natatanggap [na tulong] mula sa gobyerno at sa ibang bansa* [No supplies or any form of aid reached the island because these were all blocked by Ayala and SIDEKO; they said that Sicogon is a ‘no man’s land’ that is why we did not receive any aid from the government or from other countries],” she added. As a result, the people were forced to temporarily migrate to the timberlands after being barred by private guards [of Ayala and SIDEKO]

from repairing their houses. Je-ann also recounted that after three months of residing in the timberlands and having no means of livelihood there, the people ultimately decided to return, reclaim their community, and repair their homes notwithstanding the risk of harassment from the guards. Raul also added that, as the people experienced harsh conditions, Ayala capitalized on this and utilized underhanded methods to sever the unity of Sicogon.

Half of the nearly 6,000 residents of the island were coerced to leave their homes, with some opting to transfer to other municipalities. The FESIFFA President was even threatened by Ayala, through the local government officials, into signing the Compromise Framework Agreement (CFA) which favored the corporation. Shortly after, Ayala's request for land conversion in Sicogon was also immediately approved.

Series of human rights violations and harassments moved FESIFFA to file a petition to revoke the land conversion, and to protest in front of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in Manila to raise the concerns and demands of the peoples of Sicogon. "*Nag-antay kami doon; natutulong kami doon ng tatlong linggo sa harap ng DENR at DAR para harapin lang nila kami* [For three weeks, we camped out in front of DAR and DENR just for them to hold a dialogue with us]," Je-ann added. FESIFFA also filed an administrative case against the corrupt public officials at the above-mentioned agencies.

Rommel Dela Cruz explained FESIFFA's alternative development plan that focused on environmental conservation and sustainable food production mechanisms in Sicogon. According to him, the coastal lands' Marine Protected Areas (MPA) shall be protected for the preservation of marine aquatic resources, while securing people's access to adequate food. Timberlands are to be planted with fruit-bearing trees and forest trees, in accordance to the Community-based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA) that FESIFFA undertook to counter Ayala's claim. As for the agricultural lands, they have already been occupied by FESIFFA to expedite Ayala's distribution of ten hectares of land for each barangay in Sicogon. The result of this occupation has been advantageous for the people. Ayala has already initially distributed five hectares.

Despite the challenges in resisting development aggression to Sicogon Island, Raul boldly declared that FESIFFA has remained steadfast in asserting the peoples' land rights and securing their right to shelter and food security.

Grassroots Movement for Ecological Protection

■ Fernando Avelino Ximenes

Komite Esperansa (KE) and Rehabilitacao Ecologia Nacional (RENAL)

In his presentation, Fernando Ximenes explained KE and RENAL's objectives, activities, and views on ASEAN. KE and RENAL are political student organizations engaged in the Peasant Movement of Timor Leste. As Fernando discussed, its objectives are: (1) to counter the hegemonic political ideology and market logic existing in the country; (2) propagate ideas of emancipation; and (3) popularize critical pedagogy among the youth to surface critical class consciousness. Both KE and RENAL's activities are mostly focused on educating, organizing, and mobilizing masses to advance "a new path of development" in Timor Leste.

For KE and RENAL, ASEAN is a regional intergovernmental formation oriented to assist the capitalist mode of production and its interrelated circuits in Southeast Asia. "It is a space for capitalism [to thrive] in the Southeast Asian region," he added. Fernando explained that the politics of ASEAN is determined by the member states' national leaders. When these leaders do not align with the interests of the marginalized peoples, there is no hope for ASEAN to do so as a regional body. "We [instead] depend on the youth, creators, [and] inventors to build new politics [that is] oriented to serve the people," he added.

Fernando also emphasized the need to forge alliances and regional linkages with democratic forces that would challenge the social economic order promoted by ASEAN. "The peoples of Southeast Asia can forge a new regionalism that will serve as spaces of solidarity and resistance," he asserted.

Open Forum 2

After the discussions, Raquel Castillo immediately opened the floor for questions. Duc Nguyen raised a question about gender-based violence in Southeast Asia.

Question: Gender-based violence persists and was even heightened during COVID-19. What would you suggest the government do to better its service?

Luu Nguyet Minh then highlighted the efforts taken by CWD to address the question. The counseling initiatives at CWD showed the organization's role as a crucial platform for addressing youth concerns, specifically to ongoing instances of violence. Furthermore, Minh extended an invitation to those in need of support, ensuring that CWD stands ready to connect individuals with relevant stakeholders.

Muhammad Rastra posed a pertinent question regarding how an unaffiliated individual youth could advocate for alternative regionalism. Muhammad also inquired about leveraging social media to promote alternative regionalism, recognizing the platforms potential for widespread influence and advocacy. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, these questions were left unanswered.

Strategies towards Alternative Regionalism in Southeast Asia

*Workshop 13, Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism,
ACSC/APF 2020
6 November, 2020 8:30-10:30 PM (Hanoi Time)*

The second day of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2020 featured parallel group discussions on three major themes: Solidarity Economy, Cultural Solidarity, and Peoples' Strategy of Critical Engagement with ASEAN. Online participants via Zoom were divided into three breakout groups; each had forty-five minutes to discuss the assigned theme and answer guide questions. After the breakout sessions, each group had five minutes to present their discussions and insights to the plenary. Concurrently, Vietnamese participants held a group discussion on-site and submitted their output afterward.

Vietnamese Group Discussion

On civil society organizations and people's organizations attitude:

The Vietnamese participants underscored the need for deeper engagement among ASEAN people groups, particularly at the grassroots level. While the

ASEAN People's Forum (APF) has existed since 2000, a comprehensive and practical ASEAN People Community has yet to materialize.

They also stressed the significance of fostering connections and collaboration among civil society organizations (CSOs) and ASEAN People Groups at the grassroots level. While acknowledging the role of the APF, the consensus is that additional mechanisms and initiatives are essential. The focus should be on connecting volunteers, youth, women, children, and migrant workers.

The group also highlighted the importance of increasing the awareness of people about ASEAN. It was underscored that for meaningful engagement to occur, each group or community must have a comprehensive understanding of ASEAN. This involves facilitating access to information and promoting a clearer understanding of the opportunities available within specific groups, such as ASEAN Youth and ASEAN Women.

On expectations in engaging with ASEAN:

The discussion commenced with a call to action directed towards ASEAN youth, emphasizing the necessity for a deeper grasp of ASEAN, particularly on the ASEAN Social Cultural Community. Furthermore, they also centered on the mutual benefits that arise when ASEAN People Groups collaborate. The Vietnamese recognized the need for each group to identify and understand the advantages that come with engaging others.

On negotiating with ASEAN:

The group agreed that it is imperative to adopt a strategic approach through formulating tailored strategies for each focus group. These strategies, crucial to successful negotiations, should align with and actively incorporate the principles of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

Group 1

Social Solidarity Economy: Pathway to Alternative Regionalism

- **Discussant: Dr. Rosalinda 'Inday' Pineda Ofreneo**
Regional Coordinator, Homenet Philippines-Southeast Asia

Moderators: Venarica Papa, Hans Tabiola

Participants: Fe Manapat of WomenHealth Philippines, Paskal Tamba of KPRI, Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh, Ryan Martinez of AltDev.

1. *What comes to mind when you hear the word “Social Solidarity Economy?”*

Dr. Ofreneo started her presentation with a word cloud that mapped out concepts associated with alternative regionalism from the previous day’s discussion on Social Solidarity Economy (SSE). These concepts, such as “solidarity,” “joined resistance,” “grassroots,” and “participatory,” resonated deeply with the ethos of the SSE and the broader social movements that seek to challenge oppressive systems while simultaneously forging a more equitable society.

The social solidarity economy is not a phenomenon confined to Southeast Asia. Rather, it represents a global phenomenon that has taken root in various parts of the world. Its origins can be traced to Latin America, where structural adjustment programs, imposed by multilateral institutions, led to the displacement of workers, primarily from factories and production centers. In response to this crisis, communities took control of these facilities, driven by a desire to uphold human dignity and preserve the principles of social democracy.

The World Social Forum has emerged as a global counterpart to the ASEAN Social Forum, providing a platform for discussions and experiences surrounding SSE. These forums serve as avenues for synthesizing the diverse SSE experiences

and visions of social movements, emphasizing its universality and the potential for mutual learning. The detrimental impacts of neoliberal globalization, not only in ASEAN nations but also across the globe, particularly in Latin America, have further underscored the viability of SSE as a compelling alternative to mainstream economic models.

On Social Solidarity Economy's Global Expansion and Movement

The SSE movement is steadily gaining momentum, uniting millions of individuals under a single cooperative movement. This movement boasts a remarkable network of three million cooperatives across the globe, providing employment opportunities for an impressive 280 million individuals. A resurgence of cooperatives is evident in Latin America and Africa. Meanwhile, social enterprises are on the rise, particularly in the ASEAN region. Women have played a pivotal role in spearheading the SSE movement, particularly in South Asia. Self-help groups have also flourished, and fair trade initiatives have found their counterparts in Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and other countries, emphasizing the importance of fair trade in SSE discourse.

At the global level, an intercontinental SSE network has emerged with RIPESS and the Asian Solidarity Economy Cooperative (ASEC) serving as its Asian wing. Dr. Denison Jayasooria's plenary address emphasized the crucial role of ASEC and its connections to the ASEAN context. Efforts are also underway to mainstream SSE within government structures, resulting in the establishment of ministries and national secretariats dedicated to SSE initiatives. Within the UN system, a specialized SSE entity has been working to influence progressive institutions, like the International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United Nations (UN) Women, to adopt the SSE principles. Notably, the establishment of a UN Task Force on Social Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE) signifies the growing recognition and importance of SSE at the international level.

The UNTFSSSE defines SSE as the production of goods and services by a diverse range of organizations and enterprises that are driven by explicit social and environmental objectives. Guided by principles of cooperation, solidarity, equity, and democratic self-management, SSE represents a departure from

the conventional profit-maximizing model. It prioritizes social objectives and recognizes the transformative power of collective action and active citizenship in fostering economic and political empowerment, particularly among marginalized groups. SSE aims to “reintroduce notions of ethics, sharing, equality, and democracy into economic activities,”⁶ emphasizing a holistic and inclusive approach to economic development.

On Distinguishing Social Solidarity Economy Initiatives

ASEC has identified five dimensions to distinguish SSE initiatives. First, SSE organizations prioritize inclusive, participatory, accountable, and transparent governance. Second, SSE organizations uphold ethical values that stand in stark contrast with exploitative practices which serve personal interests or advantages. Third, SSE organizations are committed to providing social development, social protection, and a range of benefits to their members, fostering a sense of collective well-being. Fourth, SSE organizations recognize the urgency of ecological conservation and integrate sustainable practices into their operations. Fifth, SSE organizations strive to achieve economic sustainability, ensuring their long-term viability and ability to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable society.

Moreover, SSE organizations embody the Triple Bottom Line framework that place an emphasis on 3P’s (People, Planet, and Profit). Alongside having a people-centric focus, SSE is also deeply concerned about the state of our planet, as it acknowledges the climate crisis and the importance of adopting sustainable practices. The concept of biospheres plays a central role in understanding environmental limits and the necessity to conserve, recycle, and reuse resources.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have further expanded the Triple Bottom Line framework through introducing peace and partnership as additional dimensions. Peace is inextricably related to SSE, since economic stability and security are fundamental prerequisites for preventing conflicts and wars. Partnership, on the other hand, reinforces the notion that we are not isolated entities; collaboration is essential for achieving our collective goals.

6 United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy, “What is the Social and Solidarity Economy?,” <https://unsse.org/sse-and-the-sdgs/>

Within the SSE framework, various actors are crucial to its success. The central figure is the self-managed, democratically controlled enterprise. These enterprises are interconnected with civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They sometimes receive support from private businesses and charitable foundations. Governments also play a significant role, particularly at the local level, where local government units (LGUs) actively support the initiatives of grassroots social solidarity enterprises.

SSE also embraces a supply chain approach that encompasses every stage of the production and consumption process. People are actively engaged in the decision-making, planning, and discussion on allocating payments, surpluses and reinvestments. Shared responsibility is a cornerstone of the SSE supply chain, as self-managed enterprises rely on a network of interconnected actors to prosper and thrive. By fostering collaboration and collective responsibility, SSE promotes a more equitable and sustainable economic model that prioritizes the well-being of people and the planet.

2. *What common struggles do social enterprises and cooperatives face when they prioritize people over profit?*

Dr. Ofreneo argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed from a health emergency into an economic crisis, posing significant challenges for the worldwide initiative of social enterprises. The economic fallout has disrupted income, purchasing power, and market access, making it increasingly difficult for individuals and communities to meet their basic needs. In countries like the Philippines, where healthcare is heavily privatized, the lack of financial resources has left many people without access to essential health services, despite the existence of the Universal Healthcare Act.

Navigating the new normal also necessitated a shift towards alternative livelihoods. Many SSE actors turned to food production as a means of ensuring food security and promoting community-supported organic agriculture. Community gardens and agroecological farms, often linked to peasant movements, have emerged as vital hubs for food sovereignty and sustainable agricultural practices. The adoption of organic practices is driven by the need to protect the environment and public health from the negative impacts of chemical-intensive commercialized agriculture.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital tools and online facilities among social enterprises. With physical gatherings and mobility restricted, cell phones and digital platforms have become indispensable for selling products, organizing initiatives, disseminating information, conducting education and awareness campaigns, engaging in advocacy efforts, and networking with stakeholders.

While adapting to these new realities, social enterprises and cooperatives have also faced financial constraints due to the additional resources required to comply with health protocols, labor standards, and environmental regulations. These measures, while essential for protecting public health and the environment, have placed a strain on the net surplus or profit of SSE operations.

The common struggles faced by social enterprises and cooperatives in the era of COVID-19 emphasize the need to recover income and purchasing power that is extremely vital for accessing essential services, specially healthcare. The shift to alternative livelihoods, particularly in food production, aligns with the principles of food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture.

3. *What commodities and/or services have the potential for regional exchange and partnerships among social enterprises and cooperatives across Southeast Asia?*

Dr. Ofreneo remarked that regional exchange requires post-pandemic recovery and resumption of both domestic and international trade and travel. Drawing upon HomeNet's rich experience spanning over a decade, she then highlighted the potential of easily exchangeable products and valued services within the ASEAN region and beyond. These exchanges are deeply rooted in cultural context, showcasing unique crafts and traditions that define each country. Food and textiles, for instance, represent a vibrant tapestry of regional craftsmanship. Silk, a prized textile, finds its origins in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos, while Indonesia boasts its exquisite batik.

The ASEAN Forum held in Bangkok last 2019 underscored the growing market for recycled products. Items like juice bags, market bags, and mats, which were meticulously crafted from repurposed materials, exemplify the ingenuity of SSE practitioners. Recycled products can also be made into accessories and personal care supplies.

Furthermore, herbal medicines, oils, and aromatherapy, steeped in indigenous traditions, have garnered widespread appeal. The pandemic and consecutive lockdowns have spurred a renewed interest in agriculture. Crops, such as purple okra, have the potential for regional exchange too. Planting has become a therapeutic activity, providing solace and fostering a connection with nature during challenging times. These are some products that have potential for regional exchange.

The services sector also presents promising avenues for collaboration. Ecotourism, spearheaded by social enterprises and cooperatives, offers a balance of economic empowerment and cultural preservation. SSE practitioners showcase their unique traditions, initiatives, successes, and challenges through welcoming visitors in their communities, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

4. *What mechanisms and processes may be designed to facilitate regional exchange and collaboration among social enterprises and cooperatives across Southeast Asia?*

HomeNet's extensive experience has yielded valuable insights into mechanisms that facilitate exchange between countries. Dr. Ofreneo reflected on effective strategies, citing examples such as a fair trade in Cambodia, a craft link in Vietnam, bazaars, study tours, and exposure dialogues from Sehwan City in Pakistan.

The adoption of digital tools and online facilities has become indispensable for SSE actors to stay connected, coordinate activities, and reach new markets amidst the constraints of isolation and mobility restrictions. The importance of navigating online platforms was also established. In conclusion, Dr. Ofreneo encouraged her fellow SSE practitioners to delve deeper into the discussion, and share their own insights and experiences to collectively chart a path towards more regional exchanges within the ASEAN region.

Discussion, Exchanges, Manifestations

The discussion started with Venarica Papa (Vena) encouraging participants to introduce themselves and share their insights on social solidarity economy. Vena then referred to the presentation of Dr. Ofreneo, prompting participants to reflect on the ideas presented.

She also recalled the presentation of Sastro of Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI) from the previous day, highlighting the focus on the social solidarity economy practice in Indonesia. Sastro envisioned the establishment of a mechanism akin to Alibaba and Ebay to catalyze regionalism. This led to a central question: “How can we materialize this vision and make regionalism a tangible reality?”

Vena also reflected that the primary reason for inviting Dr. Ofreneo to become the discussant was due to Homenet’s active engagement in the practice of regional social solidarity economy. This real-world example served as an inspiration for exploring the practical implementation of regionalism within the context of social solidarity economy.

On Regional Organizing and Upgrading SSE Value Chains

The discussion commenced with Fe agreeing with Dr. Ofreneo’s perspective on the necessity of implementing specific actions to establish a fair economy, particularly for grassroots communities. Fe emphasized the need for collective efforts to create a network, specifically within the Philippines. She also highlighted the importance of upgrading products and services, suggesting that the goal should be to place them at par with those offered by major companies. Furthermore, she recommended that other countries adopt a similar approach by establishing their own networks and investing in the improvement of their products, services, and mechanisms. This, she believed, would allow smaller entities to compete more effectively with prominent corporations and capitalists.

On Advantage of SSE In Ecological/Environmental Campaigns

Fe highlighted a distinctive advantage of the SSE practitioners, emphasizing their commitment to environmental protection. This is juxtaposed to other businesses claiming to be pro-environment without genuine commitment. She also proposed the idea of uniting with other groups to collaboratively explore alternatives, aligning with the sentiments expressed by Dr. Ofreneo.

Following Fe's remarks, Vena acknowledged the significance of her suggestion and expressed gratitude for the input. She endorsed the idea of creating a network specifically for those engaged in social solidarity economy. She suggested that the group should identify available products within the network and explore possibilities for collaboration. Moreover, she emphasized the need for a thorough scanning process to identify potential participants and products that could contribute to the formation and success of the network.

On Fostering Strong Local Organizing

According to Dr. Ofreneo, in order to establish regional networks, there must be a solid foundation of national countrywide networks to begin with. ASEC Philippines serves as an example. She then underscored the role of community-based groups, acknowledging that life and grassroots initiatives are central to the creation and survival of social solidarity enterprises.

Dr. Ofreneo also highlighted the substantial efforts required for organizing and raising awareness at the grassroots level. She expressed that progress at the top is often unattainable without a solid foundation at the bottom. Furthermore, she underscored the importance of initiating work from the ground level, acknowledging that the survival and adaptability demonstrated by people during the COVID-19 pandemic originated from grassroots initiatives. Some examples include village savings and loan associations, community gardens, and the transformation of home care products into essential items, like face masks and hand sanitizers.

To confront major players such as multinational corporations, Dr. Ofreneo pointed out that a robust starting point is necessary. This involves the development of products and markets. She also highlighted the resilience and creativity exhibited by individuals at the grassroots level, emphasizing the importance of fostering these qualities from the ground up.

On Social Solidarity Economy Practice in Indonesia

According to Paskal, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique opportunity to move away from the current capitalist system, which is unsustainable and exploitative, and embrace the social solidarity economic model as an alternative.

He proposed two key solutions to achieve this transformation, with the first being the recognition of *Kooperasi* in ASEAN. *Kooperasi*, a private union in ASEAN owned and operated by individuals for common interests, holds the potential to serve as an alternative to the current capitalist system. Paskal urged the ASEAN People's Forum (APF) to officially recognize *Kooperasi* within ASEAN, which would grant it the legitimacy and necessary influence to promote its alternative economic solutions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Paskal also proposed for the establishment of alternative banks owned and operated by their members. These banks aim to provide funding for education institutions within grassroot communities, standing in stark contrast to profit-driven financing corporations.

Paskal also criticized the unfair exploitation of ASEAN countries under the capitalist system, emphasizing that their abundant natural resources and large workforces have not translated into equitable economic gains. He believed that *Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI)*, a cooperative in Indonesia, is a model for a more sustainable and equitable economy. KPRI members adhere to a principle of self-sufficiency (producing what they consume and consuming what they produce), as exemplified by their production of rice, coffee, and cigarettes. To conclude, Paskal then urged ASEAN countries to unite and adopt these alternative solutions to capitalism.

On Decision Making as Central Concept in SSE

Ashish, a representative of *Kalpavriksh*—an environmental organization in India—presented the framework of alternative principles that was developed through the initiative of the *Vikalp Sangam* in India and extended parts of South Asia. The framework encompasses five key principles:

- **Ecological Integrity and Resilience:** This principle emphasizes the preservation of nature and biodiversity, maintaining ecological functions, respecting ecological limits, and incorporating ecological ethics in all human actions.
- **Social Well-being and Justice:** This principle advocates for fulfilling lives for all individuals and communities, promoting equity, fostering communal

harmony, and eradicating hierarchies and divisions based on various social identities.

- **Direct and Delegated Democracy:** This principle promotes a participatory decision-making process that begins at the local level, enabling every individual to contribute meaningfully. It envisions a system of downwardly accountable institutions that extends to larger governance structures while respecting the needs and rights of marginalized groups.
- **Economic Democracy:** This principle emphasizes community and individual control over the means of production, distribution, exchange, and markets. It promotes localization of basic needs and trade built upon this foundation, advocating for the replacement of private property with commons.
- **Cultural Diversity and Knowledge Democracy:** This principle encourages the coexistence of multiple knowledge systems, respecting diverse ways of living, ideas, and ideologies, and fostering creativity and innovation.

Moreover, Ashish highlighted the importance of decentralized decision-making and the role of local communities in shaping their own economies and governance structures. He warned that conflict is likely to arise in governments where communities are marginalized, highlighting the need for a social solidarity economy. In this system, the people's voices are heard, and participatory democracy is practiced. For instance, in some parts of India, the community declared to re-elect the government in New Delhi. In Ashish's village, meanwhile, the residents have decided to have their own form of governance. He also expressed the desire for further exchanges and learnings among regions to strengthen and refine these alternative principles and practices.

In line with grassroots' creativity, Vena recounted a remarkable grassroots initiative that emerged in Mindanao during the pandemic: barter trade. This enabled communities to fulfill their basic needs without resorting to profit-driven transactions. However, when the government became aware of the said initiative, they did not support it. Instead, officials imposed regulations and taxes. This highlights the difference between community-driven solutions and profit-driven approach often promoted by governments.

Drawing a parallel to the overarching theme of the conference, Vena emphasized the crucial role of the ASEAN People's Forum in providing a platform for critique and resistance against the neoliberal values espoused by ASEAN and its member states, as articulated by Dr. Ofreneo in her presentations.

On the Challenges of SSE

According to Paskal, the adoption and integration of solidarity practices across economic activities is a key challenge facing the SSE movement. He then emphasized the significance of cooperatives as economic institutions as compared to profit-driven corporations. By institutionalizing solidarity practices across production, consumption, and distribution, the SSE movement can pave way for a more just and equitable economic landscape. Agreeing with Paskal's statement, Vena also highlighted that the institutionalization and widespread adoption of the social solidarity economic model could pose significant challenges for the movement.

On Collective Self Reliance and Financing SSE (Economic Sustainability)

Dr. Ofreneo advocated for practical and accessible approaches that empower communities to achieve financial independence. According to her, attaining financial self-reliance doesn't require grand ambitions or large-scale initiatives. Instead, grassroots-driven financial solutions must be tailored to the specific needs of local communities.

Dr. Ofreneo then cited examples of successful grassroots-based financial institutions, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) bank in India. It is run by grassroots women who provides accessible banking services particularly to illiterate women. Other examples of microfinance institutions include village savings and loan associations, which are prevalent in self-help groups in Southeast Asia countries like the Philippines. These institutions, she explained, empower communities to save, borrow, and manage their finances collectively. At its core, financial self-reliance involves collectively managing finances and establishing a readily available pool of financial resources.

On Active Citizenship And Empowerment SSE

Dr. Ofreneo emphasized the connection between political democracy and social solidarity economy (SSE). SSE, in its very definition, is active citizenship and empowers people to drive positive change.

Dr. Ofreneo also stressed the importance of placing people at the heart of SSE initiatives, advocating for their active involvement in shaping their own realities. Furthermore, she underscored the urgency of countering human rights violations and safeguarding the spaces where SSE can flourish. According to her, this is the pivotal connection between SSE and political democracy.

Recognizing that engaging with the government at the local level is an integral part of political activism, Dr. Ofreneo pointed out that representing oneself in government and advocating for SSE-friendly policies are both forms of political engagement.

Nevertheless, Dr. Ofreneo emphasized the importance of empowering individuals at the grassroots level. This can be done through fostering their ability to produce goods, manage their enterprises, and simultaneously engage in political work. She asserted that without first addressing people's basic and fundamental needs through SSE, advocacy efforts risk losing support.

On SSE and Addressing the Mainstream and Macro

With regards to the relationship of SSE on the macro level, Dr. Ofreneo shared that ASEC Philippines has already conducted a valuable discussion on resilience and the intersection of debt management with the construction of a women-led people's economy. It is crucial to examine budgetary allocation practices, debt accumulation, and the diversion of resources away from social services and economic recovery initiatives.

However, institutions that have been the subject of activism for the past five decades disproportionately absorb a significant portion of these resources. Creditor institutions, once again, wield considerable influence at the expense of communities and economic development. Therefore, it is imperative to establish connections between the local, regional, national, and global levels, exploring

how SSE can provide a comprehensive solution that addresses issues in the economic, ecological, political, and systemic spheres.

Group 2

Cultural Solidarity

Moderators: Ryan Silverio, Bianca Martinez

Participants: Jeninna Enriquez (AltDev), Bong Ramillo of Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress, Ivanka Custodio

The moderators prefaced the discussion by sharing their insights and musings from Ivanka's discussion on cross-border cultural solidarity. Ryan Silverio of ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC) highlighted the significance of the key themes, including the role of cultural solidarity as both a source and a form of resistance. He emphasized that culture extends beyond the realms of performance and the arts, permeating our daily practices. Amidst the market-driven neoliberal approach adopted by ASEAN and its member governments to promote hegemony, the importance of embracing diversity and variety has become increasingly apparent in our daily cultural interactions and connections within social institutions.

Moreover, the discussion illuminated the practical aspects of culture and resistance, particularly through activities like remembering, reclaiming, and revisiting collective memory. The evolving nature of culture and memory was also stressed, emphasizing that they are not static elements rooted solely in the past. Instead, they encompass values and traditions that continuously shape our actions and can serve as sources of inspiration. After the synthesis, the group proceeded to answer the following five questions.

1. *What has been the attitude or response of ASEAN towards CSOs?*

Bong emphasized the historical neglect of civil society organizations by ASEAN governments. Such negligence has driven the need for a gathering space that takes a different approach—one that isn't reliant on government involvement.

Ivanka echoed this sentiment, highlighting that the stance of ASEAN governments is unlikely to shift soon. According to her, ASEAN government's negligence has also spurred efforts to establish alternative regional integration methods.

Meanwhile, Jeninna stressed the importance of giving civil society organizations a larger platform for their voices to be heard, particularly within formal institutions.

Bianca drew attention to the challenges posed by ASEAN's non-intervention principle, including its obstruction of the protection of human rights within communities. Moreover, this principle forces countries to compete instead of fostering cooperative economies. As large corporations dominate trade, the region aims to attract investments from Global North countries, conflicting with the ideal scenario of regional economic integration that benefits farmers, workers, and small-scale producers.

2. *What are your personal values? (i.e., guides your actions, decisions, and your visions of what a better world would look like)*

Bong shared his vision for a better world, which centers around direct democracy at the municipal or local level. He envisioned democratic communities empowered to make decisions that directly affect their localities.

As an activist, Ivanka's personal values are guided by the principles of justice and equity. She has actively challenged relationships, interactions, and even systems or structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality. On the affective and emotional side of cultural activism, she argued that values such as being nurturing and inclusive are important. Feminist movements have shown that emotions play a huge role in building alternative visions of society. Similarly, Jeninna, a socialist feminist, concurred with the significance of emotions in shaping movements and our collective aspirations for the future.

Bianca expressed that her values align with striving for participative democracy, one inclusive of perspectives and experiences from the grassroots. She also emphasized the importance of gender justice and climate justice as guiding principles in our actions and decisions.

3. *In your context, what do you think are problematic traditions that should be changed?*

Ivanka answered that feudal vestiges and *padrino* or patronage systems in the Philippines are problematic traditions that impact the way our country operates. She also emphasized that the concept of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) contributes to highly unequal political relationships. This, among other traditions, need to be transformed.

Jeninna expressed that problematic traditions must be re-evaluated and changed, recognizing their deep-rooted connections to systemic issues such as patriarchy, growing fascism, and capitalism. She then highlighted the concept of intersectionality, stressing that these societal challenges are interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation. Culture is also embedded within this systemic context, making it imperative to consider the impact of class and gender disparities, particularly in the Philippines. Many of these traditions have been significantly influenced by colonialism and imperialism, impeding the growth of grassroots movements as they often impose Western cultural ideals.

Bianca, building upon Jeninna's previous insights, illustrated that the traditions we strive to challenge, like patriarchy, are deeply rooted within present dominant systems. She pointed out that some of these traditions are influenced and perpetuated by systems of oppression and inequality.

Bianca further identified that the culture of individualism hinders the creation of spaces for cross border solidarity. She also delved into the culture of authoritarianism, which is not limited to national or community levels but also evident in various social spaces, including workplaces, schools, and families. In these settings, authority figures, order, and discipline often take precedence. Hence, questioning authority can be viewed as disrespectful. This perspective restricts individual freedom and contributes to the presence of authoritarian governments.

Furthermore, Bianca stressed the importance of being mindful of these traditions even within progressive movements. She raised the critical issue of challenging and addressing problematic traditions from within social movements.

4. *In your own local context, what ways have grassroots communities, CSOs, and individual activists, challenge cultures of inequality, discrimination, oppression, as well as institutions that enabled these kinds of cultures? What practices have been successful?*

Ryan answered that, in terms of authoritarianism and heroic figures in social movements, a lot of activists in Thailand challenge the powers of the monarchy by calling for reforms and holding the latter accountable towards the people.

Bong challenged the common perception that often separates artists from the community, categorizing community members as non-artists. According to him, this separation is a flawed notion. He drew inspiration from the words of Renato Constantino, who stated that the masses create history. Expanding on this concept, Bong asserted that the masses also create art and culture. Thus, he emphasized the need to explore and enhance approaches and strategies that empower communities to actively participate in art and culture, rather than favoring specialists or professionals. Bong acknowledged his training as an artist but advocated for a collaborative approach. Quoting Archbishop Oscar Romero's idea of "we walk together," communities should guide cultural and artistic pursuits, rather than allowing trained practitioners to dictate aesthetics and agendas.

Bong also stressed the importance of being an integral part of one's community, walking alongside community members, as they are an inherent part of the cultural and artistic process. He underscored the significance of solidarity in building a culture of resistance. Separating oneself from the community and privileging individual interests and perspectives could undermine these essential solidarities.

Ryan agreed with Bong that artists and culture are inherently part of the flow of movement and activism. In light of their discussion, Ryan raised a question: "But, considering the context where artificial divide still exists, what kind of spaces or mechanisms can we create so that artists and cultural workers can have the valuable space within?"

Bong responded that the artificial divide is often only present in our minds and should not hinder collaborative efforts. He highlighted the importance of participatory approaches where decisions are collectively made throughout the process. While a facilitator may be present, the decision-making should involve everyone.

Bong also encouraged changing the way that we approach art, emphasizing the values of collectivity, collaboration, and community. He pointed to participatory art practices and disciplines as avenues for realizing this vision. Furthermore, he introduced the concept of creating art from the ground up, underlining the idea that we can design environments that generate art in a meaningful way. This includes constructing large spaces and engaging in placemaking, where the simple presence of community members can spark artistic creations, such as kinetic sculptures.

Moreover, Bong advocated for exploring various ways to enhance and practice the idea of community-based art. He emphasized the need to move beyond the traditional focus on individual practitioners and, instead, embrace a more collective and inclusive approach.

Meanwhile, Ivanka shared that intersectionality changed the way they conduct politics within their movements. She acknowledged that the structures of class, gender, and race affect people with different identities and positionalities in different ways. She explained that, due to the tendency of some voices to dominate over others, “we have started to center the voices of the most marginalized within our ranks.” The practice of mainstreaming the culture of intersectionality must be reflected in movements.

Jeninna also shared her perspective and echoed the sentiments of Ivanka and Bong regarding participative arts. She emphasized the potential of such framing to be applied not only to art but also to organizations and social movements working towards their goals. She also highlighted the concept of intersectionality and its relevance in involving people in various ongoing initiatives. She then provided an example from her work at AltDev, where they engage in activities like “Lawan” or documenting alternative practices within communities during the pandemic. This kind of engagement allows people to interact, share experiences, and draw inspiration from one another. She stressed that this approach is applicable in the context of Southeast Asia.

Jeninna also underscored the importance of combining these practices and communicating them effectively across borders, which is key in building stronger cultural solidarity. By doing so, different communities can recognize both their similarities and differences. They can also work together to leverage their strengths and unique qualities towards a more unified region.

Bianca then commented that, aside from art as an expression, doing political education with grassroots—through learning about their narratives and experiences and working with communities in articulating alternatives to problematic systems—is also a form of cultural work and a resistance against beliefs that propagate problematic systems.

5. *Looking at the regional level, what are possible collective strategies and cross-country mechanisms that can be explored to promote a culture of resistance?*

Bong suggested studying the cultures of resistance and solidarity of the indigenous and Southeast Asia peoples. He argued that these cultures can provide inspiration for building a culture of resistance and solidarity in the present day. He pointed out that resistance requires solidarity. He also highlighted the importance of non-hierarchical or autocratic environments to encourage productive discourse and solidarity. Ivanka echoed this sentiment and underscored the importance of giving indigenous and local practices a regional platform for the purposes of exploring possible alternatives.

Meanwhile, Bianca emphasized the possibility of exploring other regional platforms beyond ASEAN People's Forum that open spaces for genuine people-to-people interaction and engagements. She introduced the idea of employing live streaming and translating the outputs of regional and cultural events to make them more accessible to a wider audience, especially individuals not directly involved in social movements.

Peoples' Strategy of Critical engagement with ASEAN

■ Discussant: Kavi Chongkittavorn, Former editor of The Nation

Moderators: Jose Monfred Sy, Chalida Tajaroensuk

Participants: Ed Tadem, Arvin Dimalanta and Angging Aban, Jemi Irwansyah, Thilaga

1. *What has been ASEAN's attitude or response towards civil society organizations?*

Kavi noted that ASEAN does not trust CSOs and often views them as “spoilers”. He proposed a shift in CSO strategies, urging them to adopt the role of a “bridge builder”. The call to action involved becoming facilitators in ASEAN, including the Jakarta-based ASEAN Secretariat and the national committees in member countries.

Kavi elaborated on the concept of a “spoiler,” cautioning against the outright criticism of ASEAN's efforts over the years. Instead, he advocated for a more constructive approach, focusing on improvement and identifying areas that may have been overlooked. The recommended strategy was framed as a “half-filled” approach, emphasizing what has been accomplished rather than dwelling on what remains incomplete. Kavi acknowledged the importance of establishing rapport with ASEAN officials and organizations, underscoring the need for collaboration.

There was a shift in dynamics since 2005 when Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, the former ASEAN Secretary-General, expressed a desire to engage with NGOs. This marked the beginning of a fruitful dialogue between CSOs and the ASEAN Secretariat. Despite acknowledging a decline in engagement after Dr. Surin's tenure, the

overall message was clear: CSOs need to actively engage and build collaborative relationships with ASEAN.

2. *What should be the peoples' strategy in working with ASEAN?*

The discussion led by Kavi emphasized the importance of reaching out to local communities and elected representatives for effective advocacy in the ASEAN context. The primary strategy involved engaging with representatives at the local level, ensuring that they comprehend the raised issues. By doing so, attention can be escalated from the local district to provincial, national, and ultimately parliamentary levels. It was noted that issues raised by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), particularly those related to them, the environment, and similar matters, often struggle to gain traction in national parliaments due to a lack of awareness among politicians. The key recommendation was to establish rapport and increase awareness without attempting to teach, thereby filling in the knowledge gaps for better understanding.

A critical observation was made regarding the slow progress of ASEAN integration, originally slated for completion in 2015 but now extended to 2025. This delay was attributed to the divergence of objectives and visions between lawmakers, politicians, and CSOs. The necessity for lawmakers to comprehend the issues affecting ASEAN, particularly those raised by CSOs, was emphasized, citing examples such as the establishment of travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The discussion also delved into the role of media in amplifying the advocacy of CSOs. It was underscored that CSOs should strategically engage with the media to ensure comprehensive coverage. While certain countries like Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia were acknowledged for their strong media presence when addressing ASEAN-related issues, the need for coordination among local media in different regions was also pointed out.

Concerns were raised about the fragmentation and diversity of grassroots communities, prompting a call for them to group together thematically to complement ASEAN initiatives rather than undermine them. The overarching advice was to build on what ASEAN has achieved and refrain from adopting an adversarial stance. Stressing the importance of adopting a constructive approach, by being a “bridge builder” rather than a “spoiler,” it was emphasized

that, despite existing cynicism toward ASEAN within some CSOs, collaboration with ASEAN is essential. Although time-consuming, is a more productive path forward.

3. *What should be the attitude of CSOs and POs when engaging with ASEAN? What should we expect? What should we negotiate?*

Kavi emphasized that the relationship between CSOs and ASEAN should not be viewed as adversarial, eliminating the need for negotiation. Rather than entering negotiations, Kavi urged CSOs to provide valuable inputs, fostering a dynamic of dialogue and consultation. He explicitly discouraged the use of the term “negotiate,” deeming it a non-starter in this context.

Kavi clarified the unique position of CSOs, emphasizing that they are neither official representatives nor non-state actors. Instead, he highlighted the importance of CSOs as entities deserving a listening ear. The recommended approach involves engaging in an open dialogue, exchanging views with ASEAN representatives to reach a consensus that serves the greater public good.

4. *How important are critical engagements with ASEAN in the form of protests, alternative forums, people to people interactions, etc.?*

Kavi discouraged the notion of everyday protests akin to those observed in Thailand, advocating for a more strategic alternative. He proposed that CSOs seek an alternative forum through collaboration with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) and national committees on ASEAN.

CSOs could initiate forums and informal discussions, particularly within the framework of human rights forums. The key recommendation is to establish a connection with national committees and engage in substantive discussions. If a consensus is reached at this level, proposals can be forwarded to the CPR. Subsequently, the issues can be elevated to the ASEAN Secretariat and high-ranking officials. According to Kavi, leaders themselves sometimes take the initiative to investigate matters if the national committees and CPR agree.

Kavi also stressed the importance of CSOs in cultivating a strong rapport and garnering support within society. This, he argued, would transform the raised issues into a consensus that leaders may present at the ASEAN level. The

effectiveness of this process lies in leaders agreeing with the issues. They can act as conduits for CSO concerns to be forwarded at the ASEAN level. However, Kavi cautioned that this process is not instantaneous, emphasizing the need for patience in the pursuit of meaningful change within the ASEAN framework.

Meanwhile, Chalida sought clarification on the concept of negotiating within ASEAN, explaining that in this context, negotiation meant bringing topics to the attention of the organization.

Kavi responded by providing a nuanced perspective, emphasizing that negotiation, in the traditional sense, is not the appropriate term. He stressed that CSOs are not adversaries; instead, they seek common ground for cooperation and improvement. Kavi advocated for a change in narrative, urging CSOs to position themselves as bridge builders rather than spoilers in the collaborative process.

Chalida then raised a concern about the lack of response to statements presented at the annual ASEAN civil society conference. Kavi offered guidance, asserting that expecting direct responses to statements is not a viable approach. He discouraged relying solely on written statements and proposed a more strategic method. Kavi advised starting from the grassroots within communities, engaging with elected officials at the district and national levels. This grassroots approach, he argued, would be more effective in conveying concerns rather than issuing standalone statements. Kavi emphasized the importance of avoiding a “firecracker” approach and, instead, adopting a long-term strategy of building from the ground up. Drawing from the progress started by CSOs since 2005, he urged them to understand ASEAN’s weaknesses and strengths, emphasizing the need to build upon the existing framework rather than attempting to dismantle it.

Discussion, Exchanges, Manifestations

After the exchange between Chalida and Kavi that underscored the significance of strategic grassroots engagement for CSOs within the ASEAN context, Mon opened the floor for other manifestations and insights.

Irwansyah engaged with Kavi’s proposal to strengthen the collaborative role of CSOs with ASEAN, expressing both appreciation and the concern of pressing

issues. The focal point was the inadequate coordination among ASEAN nations in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including divergent strategies in Vietnam and perceived shortcomings in the Philippines and Indonesia. Highlighting the looming threat of a recession reminiscent of the 1997 and 1998 Asian crisis, Irwansyah urged a more progressive and assertive approach from CSOs. While acknowledging the importance of reaching out to local communities, Irwansyah also emphasized the challenge of mobilizing consolidated efforts from the grassroots to the national level.

Irwansyah proposed a proactive solution—the establishment of a people-to-people forum as a front toward ASEAN, advocating for a more frequent, day-to-day coordination mechanism given the global significance of the current crisis. Crucially, they support a critical yet non-destructive confrontation approach, asserting that CSOs must adopt an assertive stance to pressure ASEAN for necessary changes in response to the ongoing pandemic. This encapsulates the urgency and complexity of CSO engagement in these challenging times.

Kavi responded to Irwansyah's concerns about coordinating efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic within ASEAN. Acknowledging the varying success rates of individual countries in handling the crisis, Kavi emphasized the inherent challenge of ASEAN arriving at standardized procedures in a timely manner. He recognized the impracticality of establishing a consortium of NGOs at the regional level because of resource limitations, and instead, proposed an alternative approach. Kavi also advocated for CSOs to establish effective rapport with national governments under the ASEAN recovery framework, asserting that the intimate knowledge of CSOs should play a pivotal role. He cautioned against starting with CSOs and then engaging with the government, suggesting that the reverse process is more effective in driving positive change.

In response, Chalida drew upon past experiences, citing the East Timor advocacy as an effective strategy. She highlighted the importance of organizing people within each country's embassy to collectively address issues, especially when citizens face challenges in communicating directly with their leaders.

Ed voiced substantial concerns regarding the strategy proposed for CSOs to engage with ASEAN officials. He lamented that this strategy, initiated in 2005, had shown initial promise but subsequently faltered. Ed raised serious

reservations about the effectiveness of the dialogues between CSOs and ASEAN officials, emphasizing that despite ongoing efforts, there has been a consistent lack of meaningful engagement. He highlighted the repeated attempts of CSOs to provide concrete suggestions and recommendations to ASEAN, only to find them ignored without any acknowledgment or response. Ed contested the notion that CSOs merely criticize, asserting that they have been proactive in offering constructive solutions.

Ed also underscored another critical issue—the apparent lack of trust of ASEAN towards CSOs, suggesting that ASEAN has its own agenda that hinders genuine collaboration. Despite meetings at the national level, Ed pointed out the lack of positive reactions or meaningful dialogues during regional gatherings like ASEAN summits. He recounted the 2005 interface between CSOs and government, revealing one of its limitations: only fifteen minutes were allocated, and only two head of states attended. Ed then noted the subsequent absence of such interfaces after 2005, despite the initial initiative. The culmination of these concerns was encapsulated in a 2015 ASEAN CSO assessment, indicating zero progress in dialogues and relations between ASEAN and CSOs over the span of a decade.

Arvin then asserted that local government engagement often hinders genuine CSO work in raising marginalized concerns to higher levels of governance. Meanwhile, Thilaga highlighted the repressive power dynamics and state structures in Southeast Asia, as exemplified by human rights violations. They also noted the non-interference principle that restricts ASEAN from acting progressively against these violations.

Thilaga further reflected on Kavi's points, emphasizing the need to address ASEAN principles like non-interference that impede effective CSO engagement. Kavi responded by advocating for strengthening human rights organizations at the national level, emphasizing the importance of building strong, local human rights defenders within each country. He cited Thailand's success in this regard and stressed the need to internally promote human rights than rely on external actors.

Irwasyah challenged Kavi's perspective, highlighting the threats faced by the human rights movement in Indonesia despite its development since the 1980s. Irwasyah argued that the present culture of impunity on the national level is also tolerated at the regional level. He criticized the national dialogue between

human rights organizations and ASEAN officials as a mere performance, detached from the genuine frustrations and anger on the ground. Irwasyah emphasized the broken nature of ASEAN and called for innovative solutions to address the dead-end situation, expressing the need to fix the system than destroying it.

Plenary Discussion

After the breakout group discussions, everyone was invited to return to the plenary and share their insights. Paskal represented the SSE group, Ryan Silverio spoke for the Cultural Solidarity group, and Mon outlined the exchanges and manifestations of the Critical Engagements in ASEAN group.

Social Solidarity Economy

Paskal highlighted SSE's significance. It originated in Latin America and gained traction in the Global South, specifically during the COVID-19 situation. He underscored SSE's dimensions of social responsibility governance and ethical principles, framing its common struggle amid the COVID-19 pandemic around survival, recovery, and adaptation to the new normal, with a particular emphasis on food security.

Paskal also highlighted the potential of SSE in the ASEAN region, specifically focusing on the areas of production, distribution, and mechanisms for enhancing surfaces. He introduced the concept of *Kooperasi*, an economic organization operating in Indonesia, guided by the principles of the people's economic movement, democratic management, member participation, freedom, autonomy, and the development of education, training, and information. Paskal proposed the dissemination of *Kooperasi* within ASEAN, envisioning it as a bridge for cooperative efforts among ASEAN people.

He advocated for the establishment of a center of cooperation for distribution and alternative banks at the ASEAN level. Elaborating on this vision, Paskal outlined the roles of *Kooperasi* in managing distribution by connecting community businesses across ASEAN and the alternative bank as a financier for grassroots movements. The alternative bank, in his proposal, would also serve as an economic educational institution for grassroots communities.

Cultural Solidarity

On behalf of the group, Ryan expressed their consensus that ASEAN has largely disregarded civil society over the past years. Governments have consistently ignored the civil society recommendations. He advocated for the development of alternative modes of regional integration that extend beyond state boundaries, providing more space for civil society to be heard. Ryan delved into prevailing traditions and values in the region, ranging from patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism to the influence of Western discourses on social movements. Authoritarianism, even in social movements, is also apparent. All of these problematic traditions, deeply embedded in present dominant systems, must be challenged and changed.

In terms of strategy, Ryan emphasized the need to cultivate a culture of resistance, positioning artists not only as bearers of aesthetics but as integral components of culture and history. He highlighted participatory art processes as a means to construct public spaces and foster community engagement through art. Emphasizing the role of emotions in imagining alternative communities, Ryan drew from feminist politics and proposed mainstreaming the politics of intersectionality within social movements to amplify marginalized voices.

Furthermore, Ryan suggested building upon indigenous Southeast Asian (SEA) cultures to promote an understanding of SEA histories and memories, advocating for the primacy of local initiatives that can inform and inspire each other at the regional level. Additionally, he recommended exploring diverse venues beyond the ASEAN Peoples' Forum (APF) to facilitate people-to-people engagement and broaden the scope of civil society involvement in regional discussions.

Peoples' Strategy of Critical Engagement with ASEAN

Like the other groups, Mon expressed that there was an unanimous acknowledgment of the prevalent distrust within ASEAN towards CSOs and grassroots movements. ASEAN leaders often frame these movements and activism as spoilers, impeding policy-making and diverging from their objectives. The discussant in their group also pointed out that ASEAN lawmakers, sometimes, do not have the same objectives as CSOs.

Delving into the topic of ASEAN engagements, the group had dissenting opinions. Some participants expressed the difficulty faced since 2005, with the regional body seemingly deaf to the voices of marginalized groups, CSOs, and grassroots communities. Despite these challenges, some attendees from the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia shared valuable experiences in engaging with ASEAN, offering visions for negotiation and critical engagement.

A consensus emerged on the importance of mobilizing grassroots efforts to national and regional levels while maintaining a critical perspective towards ASEAN. Participants raised concerns about ASEAN's response to the pandemic and human rights violations, highlighting the limited engagement of ASEAN human rights mechanisms during regional political upheavals.

While sentiments for a positive relationship with ASEAN were present, the prevailing view emphasized that such relationships must remain critical. Mon concluded with a recognition that the ongoing convergent space signifies the potential emergence of a new regionalism model from diverse movements and organizations. The sentiment resonated that the representative power dynamics and structure of SEA can only be achieved if the voices of civil society, grassroots, and marginalized communities are prioritized, surpassing the influence of government leaders and lawmakers in ASEAN.

Synthesis

Vena stressed the common agreement reached during the discussions, highlighting the pressing need for an alternative form of regionalism to address the shortcomings of existing structures in ASEAN's economic, political, and governance spheres. While lip service is given to inclusive development, the initiatives from peoples are often ignored. There is a lack of trust in CSOs and POs, with some even labelling them as anti-ASEAN initiatives. The neglect or suppression of CSOs and POs necessitates an alternative regionalism.

The principles of the envisioned alternative regionalism is firmly rooted in the right of the marginalized to live with dignity, aim to restore their economic autonomy and promote political, economic, and cultural democracy. The call for self-reliance is intricately connected to the pursuit of social justice and equity. The proposed strategies include raising awareness about existing alternatives, such as social solidarity economy, collective cultural solidarity, and new forms of challenging states and institutions. A solid national base for networks involved in this vision is also crucial. Fostering a culture of resistance and recognizing diversity within solidarity are also important.

Vena concluded by calling for a comprehensive assessment of the people and mechanisms involved, emphasizing processes that empower the poor and marginalized. Collectively, these insights reinforce the resounding consensus for an alternative regionalism, guided by principles that prioritize the rights and well-being of the most impoverished and marginalized populations in ASEAN nations.

Resolution of ACSC/APF 2020

The next segment of the program focused on examining the resolution adopted at the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2020. Hans guided the participants through a summarized version of the resolution while they deliberated on the concerns surrounding the advancement of alternative regionalism.

During the session, Ed clarified that the resolution spans three pages, while noting that not every detail was covered in the summary. Crucially, the resolution includes a provision that affirms the continuation of the engagement process with ASEAN. Ed emphasized the commitment to stay engaged with the ASEAN process, rejecting the idea of abandoning it. However, he stressed that proposal within the resolution must go beyond mere engagement. He also proposed a shift in approach, suggesting that, in addition to engaging with the ASEAN process, there should be a concurrent effort to establish an alternative bottom-up regional integration process driven by the people.

Ana Maria “Princess” Nemenzo then provided valuable insights during the session, expressing appreciation for Ed’s clarification. She emphasized her reluctance towards the idea of establishing entirely parallel structures, clarifying that the initiative for people-based alternative regional integration aims to define and establish the identity of the collective. Princess also underscored the comprehensive nature of their advocacies, presented as critical engagements, emphasizing that this approach does not equate to abandoning the engagement process with ASEAN.

Additionally, Princess raised the question of whether ASEAN holds a distinct perspective on economic and social interaction. She expressed reservations on the external forces and powers intervening in ASEAN affairs and conveyed dissatisfaction with the principle of non-intervention and mutual respect for autonomy. She emphasized the past non-aligned movement within the region as a positive model that should be reactivated and advanced. She suggested that future discussions must incorporate these ideas to promote the concept of a non-nuclear, non-aligned peoples’ community within ASEAN.

Fernando also expressed gratitude for the initiation of a new model for regionalism. He raised the issue of defining “the people” within the context of regional integration, pointing out the limitations posed by existing national boundaries in the ASEAN region. Fernando then drew attention to marginalized groups such as the nomadic proletariat and refugees, highlighting the challenges they face within democratic states.

He encouraged envisioning a new form of regionalism that caters to the needs of those excluded from the current political-economic system. Fernando also emphasized the aim of reinventing a new concept of people within this evolving

regionalism, envisioning it as singular, common, and universal. This approach aims to create an inclusive framework where everyone, including marginalized communities, can find a place.

In this regard, Vena highlighted the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) from traditional economic and political systems within states. She emphasized that the alternative regionalism framework they are proposing creates space for recognizing the diversity of needs, potentials, assets, capacities, and cultures of various people involved in the initiative.

Vena also expounded on the importance of inclusivity, noting that their documentation work involves partner communities, including IPs from the Philippines, Laos, and Thailand. This firsthand experience has heightened their awareness of the importance of incorporating and providing a space for IPs within the alternative regionalism endeavor.

The following are the resolutions drafted in order to overcome and address the frustration and disappointment of the results of the 13-year engagement with the official ASEAN process:

1. ACSC-APF shall develop and adopt a new vision for engagement by civil society with ASEAN based on people-to-people interactions instead of state-to-state relations or purely market-oriented interactions.
2. ACSC-APF shall lead the establishment of a new peoples' regional integration process.
 - Identify practices at the ground level: political, economic, social, and cultural
 - Document these practices using participatory methods
 - Link these practices together in conferences and other gatherings
 - Hold people-to-people exchanges
3. ACSC-APF shall establish a new peoples' regional integration network that would challenge the ASEAN model of regional integration.

4. ACSC-APF shall adopt the vision of the new Southeast Asian peoples' regional integration process based on the alternative practices of peoples, networks, and organizations across the region's societies, among others.
5. Engagement with the official ASEAN process shall continue and must complement the process of building a new peoples' regional integration process.

Finally, all parties affirmed that the ACSC-APF will undertake a process for an alternative peoples' regional integration based on the alternative practices of communities, sectors, and networks. Accordingly, ACSC/APF will adopt the appropriate resolution to the proposed process.

Annex II

Resolution on Alternative Regional Integration for Southeast Asian Peoples

Whereas, the Asean Civil Society Conference/Asean Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) has been engaging with the Asean official process since 2005, in the process presenting Asean leaders with annual statements that reflect Southeast Asian peoples' issues, concerns, and recommendations covering political, economic, social and cultural dimensions;

Whereas, an internal ACSC/APF Ten-Year Review (2005–2015), however, concluded that “individual ASEAN member countries have consistently resisted and vacillated with regards civil society participation and engagement” and that “ASEAN and its member governments have been seen to be more comfortable with the private sector and academic and research think tanks than with civil society”;

Whereas, the same internal review concluded that ten years of engagement with the official ASEAN process have been regularly defined by a “prevailing silence and lack of attention and response to the observations and recommendations raised in all previous ACSC/APF Statements”;

Whereas, the ACSC/APF 2016 Timor Leste Statement stated that “ASEAN civil society remain extremely concerned about ASEAN’s prevailing silence and lack of attention and response to the observations and recommendations raised in all previous ACSC/APF Statements”;

Whereas, a press release issued by the ACSC/APF Co-Chairs at the close of the two Laos Summits of Leaders in 2016 expressed “disappointment at the continued lack of opportunity to voice human rights concerns and critically engage with government ... (and of) ASEAN governments’ lack of recognition of civil society as a critical stakeholder”;

Whereas, the ACSC-APF Statement on 8 Aug 2017 on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN, argued that the “many years” of “critical engagement”

with ASEAN have resulted “in minimal outcomes in terms of the substantive improvement in the lives of our people”;

Whereas, the final statement of ACSC/APF on 13 November 2017 stated that “years of our critical engagement with ASEAN have not contributed in any substantive improvements in the state of our peoples’ lives and the environment” and that “issues and concerns raised by civil society, especially ACSC/APF continue to be ignored”; Whereas, the same 13 November 2017 statement of ACSC/APF pointed that the “lack of meaningful dialogue, absence of opportunities for interface with officials, and inaction over the draft terms of reference on government-nongovernment relations evidence the shrinking space for civil society to effectively shape the agenda and policies of ASEAN and their respective governments”;

Whereas, the 2015 ACSC/APF statement asserts that “engagement with the Asean process is ... anchored on a critique and rejection of deregulation, privatisation, government and corporate-led trade and investment policies that breed greater inequalities, accelerate marginalization and exploitation, and inhibit peace, democracy, development, and social progress in the region”;

Whereas, the 13 November 2017 ACSC/APF statement further noted that ASEAN continues to foster a regional integration model based on a “dominant development narrative that has bred economic, social and environmental crises, including extreme inequalities, extensive human rights violations, situations of conflict and violence, and wanton exploitation of natural resources that are overwhelming the region’s ecosystems”;

Whereas, the 13 November 2017 ACSC/APF Final statement argues that “the case for a radical transformation of ASEAN is irrefutable” and that “participants to the ACSC/APF 2017 firmly believe that such transformation will require taking decisive steps to ensure equitable distribution and sustainable use of natural resources, realize the full gamut of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights for all peoples, and to reestablish itself along the principles of solidarity, cooperation, complementarity, and friendship among nations”;

Whereas, the 13 November 2017 Statement concluded that “to this end, the ACSC/APF shall develop and adopt a new vision for engagement by civil society with ASEAN based on greater people to people interactions that will establish,

expand and strengthen a new peoples' regional integration process based on the alternative practices of peoples, networks, and organizations across the region's societies”;

Whereas, the 4 November 2018 Statement recommended that ACSC/APF “undertake a collection of grassroots case studies of community-based projects on the ground of local people taking action in building an Alternative Peoples' Economy towards an Alternative Regionalism”;

Whereas, the 2019 Statement states that ACSC/APF shall “undertake a process for an alternative peoples' regional integration based on the alternative practices of communities, sectors, and networks” and that “ACSC/APF will adopt the appropriate resolution related to the proposed process”;

Whereas, Southeast Asian peoples' grassroots communities, popular organizations, civil society organizations, and social movements have, for many years, been engaged in alternative, heterodox, and non-mainstream practices that encompass economic, political, social, and cultural aspects that directly address the issues and concerns of workers, the peasantry, urban poor, fisherfolk, women, youth/children, LGBTQI community, indigenous peoples, migrants, older persons, employees, professionals, students and persons with disabilities;

Whereas, ACSC/APF, as the region's primary network of civil society organizations, social movements, and popular organizations, is independent and autonomous of both the state and corporate business interests;

Be it therefore be 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.

Be it further resolved that, 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.

Be it further resolved that, 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.

Be it further resolved that, to show good faith on the part of Southeast Asian civil society movements, the engagement with the official Asean process shall continue and will complement the process of building a new peoples' regional integration process.

Adopted

7 November 2020

Hanoi, Vietnam

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