

# Defending Southeast Asian Peoples' Civic Space, Democracy, and Human Rights

ASEAN Civil Society Conference |  
ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022

*Convergence Space on Southeast Asian Peoples' Alternative Regionalism*

3 – 4 November 2022  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Online



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES  
CENTER FOR  
INTEGRATIVE AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
STUDIES



GLOBAL TAPESTRY of  
ALTERNATIVES

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## UP CIDS | PROCEEDINGS

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# Defending Southeast Asian Peoples' Civic Space, Democracy, and Human Rights

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*3–4 November 2022  
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## **Convergence Space Organizers**

- Program on Alternative Development (AltDev), University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS)
  - Prof. Eduardo “Ed” C. Tadem, Ph.D.
  - Ananeza “Angging” P. Aban
  - Honey B. Tabiola
  - Asst. Prof. Jose Monfred “Mon” C. Sy

- Ryan Joseph C. Martinez
- Rafael Vicent “Arvin” V. Dimalanta
  
- ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC)
- Gender and Development Cambodia (GADC)
- Home-Based Workers International Network (Homenet Southeast Asia), Southeast Asia
- Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI; Confederation of Indonesian Peoples Movements)
- Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia (MASSA)
- Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL), Philippines

These proceedings were prepared by Junah Amor C. Delfinado.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the organizers of ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People’s Forum 2022 (ACSC/APF 2022), Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism would not have been possible without the support and generosity of 11.11.11<sup>2</sup> and the Global Tapestry of Alternatives.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Junah Amor C. Delfinado ([jcdelfinado@up.edu.ph](mailto:jcdelfinado@up.edu.ph)) is a researcher at the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, Program on Alternative Development (UP CIDS AltDev).

<sup>2</sup> 11.11.11 The Coalition of the Flemish North-South Movement is a Belgian coalition of over 60 NGOs and 20,000 volunteers that aims to achieve global justice and eradicate exploitation. Visit their website here: <https://11.be/about-111111>

<sup>3</sup> Global Tapestry of Alternatives is an initiative that seeks to create solidarity networks and strategic alliances amongst movements and networks of alternatives on local, regional, and global levels. The Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia (MASSA) is one of the weavers of the GTA network. Visit their website here: <https://globaltapestryofalternatives.org/introduction>

# Analysis of the Convergence Space

## *Alternative Regionalism in Southeast Asia*

More than fifty years since its foundation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has failed to meaningfully address the issues and concerns of Southeast Asian peoples. It has only acted for the benefit of elites, political oligarchies, and corporate interests. ASEAN's model of regional integration has only widened the social inequalities existing in the region. These have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein the ACSC/APF released a joint resolution on alternative regionalism collectively grieving at "ASEAN's official responses were largely tokenistic and inefficient" (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022).<sup>4</sup> Those approaches greatly marginalized the Southeast Asian peoples, particularly "women migrant workers, informal economy workers, LGBTQIA+, indigenous peoples, stateless and internally displaced peoples, workers, and the urban poor" (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022). Worse, ASEAN governments weaponized the crisis to further hamper resistance, silence dissent, spread misinformation, and weaken the movement of Southeast Asian peoples. Despite these, as evidenced by the stories of struggle shared on the Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism, peoples' organizations, and grassroots communities have continued to devise their own ways to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic, thereby exemplifying cross-border solidarity and mutual aid.

Southeast Asia's civil society, through its continuous efforts to unite and collectively engage ASEAN, has gained ample wisdom that shaped its future trajectory. It now aims to move beyond merely engaging the state-led regional body. It endeavors to be firmly linked with grassroots initiatives that are economic, political, social, and cultural, all founded in the principles of solidarity, cooperation, mutual benefit, the commons, and joint development. The ASEAN

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<sup>4</sup> The "Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022" was endorsed by all participants of the ACSC/APF 2022. The collective document was published by the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus on their website. View the entire statement here: <https://aseansogiecaucus.org/statements/asc-statements/194-joint-statement-asean-civil-society-conference-asean-peoples-forum-2022-defending-and-asserting-southeast-asian-peoples-civic-space-democracy-and-human-rights-towards-an-equitable-and-just-society>

Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) 2022 adopted this goal in its “Resolution on Alternative Regional Integration for Southeast Asian Peoples.” It resolved that “the ACSC/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” (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022).

Against this backdrop, alternative regionalism offers an:

important approach to use in advocating the recognition and acceptance of human rights tangent to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics; safe working conditions and living wages; social protection; right to land, resources, and self-determination; access to healthcare; support for victims of gender-based violence and discrimination; digital rights; agrarian reform and sustainable food systems; and inclusive housing and city planning processes (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022).

The People-to-People (P2P) Exchange strengthens and reinforces this alternative form of regionalism in Southeast Asia. It serves as a platform for marginalized peoples “to learn together and from each other, share resources, build solidarity, and improve strategies” (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022). This process of coming together, in essence, “is international relations founded on the cross-border solidarity of nonstate players, mostly by civil society organizations. From these interactions, progressive national and international policies have been introduced, and eventually adopted by governments through pressure and collective action” (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022).

To strengthen alternative regionalism, “what is needed is networking on many levels based on common bonds and diverse platforms of engagement at the local, national, regional, and global” (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022). It must link with other similar platforms that bring together practitioners of alternative development practices exemplifying solidarity.

As such, the convergence space aims to (1) discuss the concept of alternative regionalism based on the alternative practices of communities across Southeast Asia and other alternative frameworks and modes generated from responses, and concrete actions of grassroots and marginalized communities; and (2) explore strategic actions that can strengthen people-to-people cooperation and cross-border solidarity among alternative practitioners towards alternative regionalism.

## Background of ACSC/APF 2022

The political situation in Southeast Asia has been a result of power shifts of elite governments and regime changes under rising authoritarian governance. It has exacerbated the multiple crises under ASEAN's neoliberal economic integration model. This has even pushed ASEAN to further exclude civil society and neglect peoples' voices, demonstrated by the shrinking democratic space for civil society to dissent and demand government accountability.

ASEAN and its current chair, Cambodia, have been confronted with sociopolitical turmoil, which stems from the ongoing Myanmar crisis and the crippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEAN Member States used the pandemic to clampdown on peaceful political and social dissent, restrict mobility, and deepen discrimination and violence against vulnerable groups, further challenging the state of human rights in the region in the face of increasing authoritarianism.

Neoliberal economics, which has become central in ASEAN affairs, has widened inequality, worsened poverty and environmental destruction, "expanded the control of market and capital" (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022), and exposed the dearth of social protection measures that started even before the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEAN's regional priority, through its ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), "stresses competition and productivity for the global economy" (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022). However, it fails to integrate the principles of human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Further, ASEAN focuses on maintaining state and regional security but sidelines the security, welfare, and livelihoods of its people.

Myanmar is a severe case of how entrenched this confluence of autocracy, militarism, and neoliberalism is. The military coup, which began on 1 February 2021, has created "a political, human rights, and humanitarian crisis" (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022). Over a year since the coup and the promulgation of the Five-Point Consensus, the junta has arrested 15,285 individuals and murdered 2,257 innocent civilians. The ASEAN and the international community failed to formulate effective solutions to address human rights issues, humanitarian concerns, and the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar. They also failed to "ensure justice for the long-persecuted Rohingya people" (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society

Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022). Corporate investments from countries like China and Australia have extensively shaped Myanmar's economic and geopolitical interests under the heavy control of the military junta, which also operates the country's key businesses.

The Myanmar crisis, however, is just the tip of the iceberg. Other Southeast Asian nations have faced a string of human rights transgressions over the past years. Human rights defenders in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines are routinely judicially harassed and intimidated by state forces under the guise of "lèse-majesté,"<sup>5</sup> "public order," and/or "terrorism." In Indonesia, civil society groups lament the government's Criminal Code revisions, which include provisions that undermine civic space. In the Philippines, the electoral victory of Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos Jr. and the suppression of the Candlelight Party in the recent Cambodian elections are "facets of growing authoritarianism and disinformation in the region" (Joint Statement on ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022). Lamentably, Bongbong's victory was steered by the massive organized fake news through online digital spaces.

Digitalization has manipulated the democratization of the region by keeping citizens under surveillance. The Indonesian and Thai governments, for instance, aggressively shut the internet down to limit freedom of opinion and assembly. During this COVID-19 pandemic, the introduction of contact tracing applications and other digital surveillance tools has bolstered the link between digitalization and state-corporate cooperation. While these technologies provide positive social effects, they also enhance privacy violations. Human rights groups, academics, and some media outlets have warned about the growth of the surveillance state. The concept of "surveillance capitalism," which introduces human experience as the foundation for creating behavioral data, is likewise becoming intense. Data exploitation for political and economic purposes, its transformation as a new form of data colonialism and its impact on fundamental human rights, are all increasing as human existence becomes more digitalized.<sup>6</sup>

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5 In Thailand, lèse-majesté refers to the act of insulting the king.

6 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019).



Moreover, communities from the margins of ASEAN continue to wage their struggle for a better and just future. Among the continuing fights in the region is connecting food sovereignty to the call for climate justice. Moving beyond the notion of food security, the food sovereignty movement is anchored on the praxis of agroecology, which promotes biodiversity-based farming practices led by peasants and indigenous communities. The call for climate justice undergirds these practices. The goal of this nexus of climate justice and food sovereignty is to protect the environment and create a fairer and equal world, under the leadership of those who are most impacted by a warming planet.

This future also reflects a call for life with dignity that is always, among others, a center of Southeast Asian peoples' concern, especially in the post-COVID-19 recovery. This call demonstrates the urgency for universal, inclusive, comprehensive, gender-responsive, and climate change-adaptive social protection.

In conjunction with the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits and the G20 Summit in Indonesia, the ACSC/APF 2022 is a two-day hybrid conference that tackles Southeast Asian peoples' most pressing issues on ASEAN that are under Cambodia's leadership for the year. It also targets to amplify the space for the voices of grassroots and marginalized communities.

## Objectives of the ACSC/APF 2022

Inspired by the vision of alternative regionalism, this convergence space empowers grassroots organizations, civil society organizations, and nongovernment organizations to come together. Through knowledge exchange and collaboration, they could forge solidarity across issues that transcend boundaries. To achieve this, the ACSC/APF 2022 focused on three key objectives:

- **Strengthening Intersectional Solidarity:** to strengthen intersectional and cross-movement solidarity among ASEAN civil society by raising peoples' voices on burning human rights issues and relentless attacks on civil society organizations, marginalized groups, and human rights defenders in Southeast Asia;
- **Creating a Safe Space for Sharing and Learning:** to provide a safe space for grassroots and marginalized peoples' voices that will generate

sharing and learning from cross-border struggles and solidarity towards building and sustaining an alternative regionalism amidst the rise of authoritarianism and backsliding democracy;

- **Urging Action on Human Rights and Regional Stability:** to urge ASEAN and ASEAN member states to better address human rights issues stemming from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Myanmar crisis, and other threats to human rights and regional stability, and to prioritize an inclusive and sustainable post-COVID-19 peoples' recovery that also addresses challenges of the post-pandemic development landscape.

# Day 1

## Workshop 1 and 2

### Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism, ACSC/APF 2022

*3 November 2022*  
*1:00–4:30 P.M. (Cambodia Time UTC+7)*

Workshops 1 and 2 focused on “Understanding People-to-People Regionalism” and “Stories from Below, Reinforcing Peoples’ Alternatives,” offering crucial perspectives on building a more inclusive and just Southeast Asia. After each workshop, an open forum ensued to give an avenue for participants to raise questions and share their manifestations.

The first workshop started with an examination of the limitations of top-down regionalism, which is dominated by elites and state actors. Prof. Eduardo “Ed” Tadem, Ph.D., Convenor of UP CIDS Program on Alternative Development, challenged the ASEAN model, highlighting alternative forms of regionalism already thriving at the grassroots level. These initiatives, spanning from social, cultural, political, and economic spheres, prioritize solidarity, cooperation, and shared benefits.

Meanwhile, Norm Sina of GADC shed light on the TRIANGLE Project, empowering women migrant workers through network-building and collective action. This network aims to tackle gender inequalities and isolation to amplify the voices of women in policy dialogues. Josephine Parilla, representing Homenet Southeast Asia, presented challenges faced by informal workers, particularly during the

pandemic. Meanwhile, Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Manggagawang Impormal sa Pilipinas<sup>7</sup> (PATAMABA) initiatives offered inspiring models of people-driven solutions, from bridging the digital divide to promoting food security and livelihood recovery.

Lini Zurlia, representing ASEAN Sogic Caucus, discussed LGBTQIA+ rights, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural, religious, and state-sanctioned discrimination. She emphasized the importance of alternative regionalism in advocating for the recognition and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities.

The second workshop echoed the importance of listening to and amplifying stories from below. Guangchunliu Gangmei of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) emphasized the crucial role of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in environmental stewardship and conflict resolution. She underscored the need for official recognition of their land and forest rights, as well as their capacity to respond effectively to crises.

Dr. Cynthia Maung of Mae Tao Clinic painted a stark picture of the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. The military junta's actions have exacerbated displacement, human rights violations, and ineffective COVID-19 responses.

Additionally, Chhim Sithar from the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of NagaWorld exposed the inhumane working conditions and gender-based violence faced by casino workers. She called for solidarity with workers' struggles against unfair treatment and union-busting tactics.

Finally, Vu Thi Minh Hang of the Vietnam Women's Union showcased the Peace House Shelters, which offer comprehensive support to victims of gender-based violence. These shelters demonstrate the need for context-sensitive strategies in addressing this critical issue.

Overall, Workshops 1 and 2 provided invaluable insights on how alternative regionalism could contribute to the creation of a more just and equitable Southeast Asia.

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<sup>7</sup> "Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Manggagawang Impormal sa Pilipinas" translates to "National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines" in English.



## Workshop 1

# Understanding People-to-People Regionalism From Below

- **Ryan Korbari, Argus Pelangi Indonesia**  
*Moderator*

### Introduction

Moderator Ryan Korbari of Argus Pelangi Indonesia opened the workshop by briefly explaining the background of the convergence space and its relevance to the on-going health and humanitarian crises across and beyond Southeast Asia. He prefaced the discussion by highlighting that marginalized groups head this convergence space, as they are often overlooked and left behind in the broader human rights and social justice system. Through an open dialogue and collaboration, this platform seeks to amplify the voices of these groups and explore how their grassroots responses and alternative actions address critical challenges facing society today, such as militarization and rising authoritarianism, the COVID-19 pandemic, neoliberalism, and patriarchy.

For this workshop, speakers from the Southeast Asian region discussed their experiences and insights on understanding people-to-people regionalism from below: Prof. Eduardo Tadem on “Moving Towards a Southeast Asian Peoples’ Alternative Regionalism”; Norm Sina on “For Women, by Women: Building Women Migrant Workers’ Networks”; Josephine “Olive” Parilla on “Building an Inclusive, People-Centered Regionalism: The Homenet Experience”; and Lini Zurlia on “Alternative Regionalism in the Perspective of the LGBTQIA Community.”

Ryan Korbari further emphasized that the workshop was for diverse voices and perspectives. All participants were encouraged to share their experiences respectfully and constructively.

The house rules were as follows:

- All questions would be entertained during the Open Forum of the workshop.
- For face-to-face (F2F) participants, Khmer to English translation would be provided.
- For online participants, questions could already be posted in the chat box as speakers shared.

Ryan Korbari also reminded everyone to keep their microphones muted throughout unless the moderator called them to turn it on during the Open Forum. Before moving on to the first speaker, Ryan apologized as the workshop started late due to technical difficulties.

## Moving Towards a Southeast Asian Peoples' Alternative Regionalism

### ■ Prof. Eduardo “Ed” Tadem, Ph.D.

*Convenor, UP CIDS Program on Alternative Development*

Prof. Eduardo “Ed” Tadem, Ph.D. started his presentation with an introduction and historical development of the move towards alternative regionalism. This shift gained momentum following the 2017 ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN People’s Forum (ACSC/APF) held at the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) in Quezon City. The rationale behind this exploration stems from a critical assessment, pinpointing ASEAN’s failure to meaningfully address the issues faced by Southeast Asian peoples.

Social movements and civil society organizations (CSOs) within Southeast Asia perceive ASEAN as a negative model of regional integration, dominated by political oligarchies, corporate interests, and elites. Consequently, ASEAN’s development strategies have been criticized for widening social inequalities and causing environmental destruction. The inadequacy of ASEAN’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic further exemplifies its limitations, with a lack of a unified regional approach and tokenistic official responses. Dr. Ed quoted the ACSC/APF 2020 Resolution: “ASEAN official responses have been largely token; in other words, they are not serious, and uncoordinated. Country-based stimulus programs have been inadequate and inefficient” (Resolution of ACSC/APF 2020).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Dr. Ed emphasized that “the COVID-19 pandemic is weakening an already fragile regional cohesion in the face of growing domestic and geopolitical tensions,” prompting “each ASEAN member state to go its own way” and make a mockery of regional democracy (Resolution of ACSC/APF 2020).

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<sup>8</sup> See Junah Delfinado, Rafael Dimalanta and Micah Mangahas, “Resolution of ACSC/APF 2020,” in *Southeast Asian Grassroots Practices Towards an Alternative Peoples’ Regionalism* (Quezon City: UP CIDS, 2024), 48-51. Although the Resolution of ACSC/APF 2020 originated from 2020, the proceedings of the ACSC/APF 2020 were only published in 2024.



## *On the Need for Alternatives*

Recognizing these deficiencies, there is a growing need for alternatives, particularly an alternative forum for regional integration, calling for practical solutions grounded in ongoing activities labeled as “alternative practices.” The current model of regional integration, as exemplified by ASEAN, prioritizes cut-throat competition, profit maximization, and narrow forms of nationalism. This approach has failed to address the needs of marginalized communities and has exacerbated social inequalities. Therefore, there is a pressing need for an alternative forum on regional integration based on principles of solidarity, cooperation, and social justice.

Communities across Southeast Asia are already actively engaged in alternative practices that embody the core values of the desired regional model. These practices are diverse and include initiatives in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. These alternative practices are not new and represent the culmination of traditional wisdom and knowledge that communities have inherited and refined over generations. According to Dr. Ed, “These efforts on the ground can comprise the elements of the new civilization we need to build and foretell the configuration of what a future just society would look like.”

In line with this, the 2020 ACSC/APF held in Hanoi, Vietnam approved a “Resolution on Alternative Regional Integration for Southeast Asian Peoples” that was adopted and part of the documentation of ACSC/APF 2020, which resolved that:

The ACSC/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.

To lead the way forward to greater participation by Southeast Asian peoples in cross-border interactions and undertakings, this new vision shall lead to the establishment of a new peoples’ regional integration process.

As a preliminary starting point, the new Southeast Asian peoples’ regional integration process shall be based on, among others, the alternative practices of peoples, networks, and organizations across the region’s societies.

### *On Economic Alternative Practices*

For economic alternative practices, a diverse range of initiatives was explored, emphasizing their pivotal role in reshaping regional dynamics. On the production side, activities included the establishment of producer cooperatives, social enterprises, and solidarity-economy-based initiatives. Notably, these practices extended to food production and distribution, encompassing alternative trade, organic family farms, agroecology, biodiversity, zero-waste production, and indigenous agronomic practices such as plant breeding. Furthermore, Dr. Ed underscored the importance of community-based renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and biogas in power generation. On the marketing side, he also highlighted the significance of fostering direct producer–consumer linkages, reviving local markets, and promoting fair trade and mutual exchange.

### *On Political Alternative Practices*

Shifting focus to Political Alternative Practices, the session illuminated the engagement of numerous individuals in networks of civil society organizations (CSOs), social movements, and people’s organizations (POs). Dr. Ed detailed activities, such as joint political advocacies and mass mobilizations, which serve as alternatives to traditional political parties and oligarchies. Direct actions by deprived communities, including unilateral land occupations, were discussed alongside community-led planning with a socioeconomic focus. The utilization of traditional conflict-settlement mechanisms and the creative use of social media platforms were recognized as contemporary political alternative practices.

### *On Social Alternative Practices*

The discussion then transitioned to social alternative practices. These practices encompass self-help groups for social protection, community-based health care systems adhering to primary care principles, and the vital role of “barefoot” health practitioners. Ongoing alternative learning initiatives, including folk schools, nonformal centers, and lifelong learning advocacies, were emphasized. The session also highlighted alternative housing programs designed with a people-oriented approach and the incorporation of vernacular architecture that utilizes indigenous materials.

## *On Cultural Alternative Practices*

Lastly, the focus turned to cultural alternative practices, underscoring the richness and historical depth of Southeast Asian creative arts. Networks of visual artists and performers were acknowledged for showcasing the diversity and significance of the region's cultural heritage. Cultural practices were noted for intersecting with and highlighting critical political, social, and economic issues faced by marginalized sectors of society. Ultimately, cultural practices were portrayed as revealing a human and spiritual dimension to political and economic dimensions, underscoring the integral role of culture in shaping regional perspectives.

## *Peoples' COVID-19 Response as Documented by UP CIDS AltDev*

Dr. Ed discussed how communities have responded to the ongoing pandemic, as extensively documented by UP CIDS AltDev.<sup>9</sup> Notably, the impact of the pandemic on grassroots and marginalized communities has been diverse and uneven, contingent upon factors such as location, the state of community organization, and the level of social solidarity and collective consciousness.

Urban communities have borne a more negative brunt compared to their rural counterparts. In particular, those engaged in food production have demonstrated better resilience in the face of the pandemic. Informal workers and migrants, however, have been among the hardest hit, experiencing heightened incidences of hunger and unemployment. Meanwhile, organized communities, especially

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9 UP CIDS AltDev released a comprehensive volume documenting cases of people's alternatives initiated and sustained during the COVID-19 pandemic. This volume includes the following: Eduardo C. Tadem et al., *A Report on Southeast Asian Community Responses in COVID-19 Times* (Quezon City: UP CIDS and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2020). <https://rosaluxmanila.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/UP-CIDS-AltDev-RLS-A-Report-on-Southeast-Asian-Community-Responses-in-COVID-19-Times-compressed.pdf>; Eduardo C. Tadem et al., eds., *Southeast Asian Peoples in Pandemic Times Challenges and Responses (COVID-19 Grassroots Report Volume 2)* (Quezon City: UP CIDS and 11.11.11 Coalition, 2022). <https://cids.up.edu.ph/up-monograph/challenges-responses-covid-19-grassroots-report-volume-2/>; Eduardo C. Tadem et al., *Marginalized Societies and the State in the Time of a Pandemic: The Philippine Case* (Quezon City: UP CIDS, United Nations Educational, and Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). <https://cids.up.edu.ph/download/public-policy-monograph-series-2021-01-marginalized-societies-and-the-state-in-the-time-of-a-pandemic-the-philippine-case/>

those with collectively-owned and collectively-managed lands utilizing sustainable development and agroecological methods, have proven to be more adept at mitigating the effects of the health crisis.



■ Figure 1. Prof. Eduardo C. Tadem delivers his analysis on Peoples' COVID-19 Response. Source: Ryan Martinez, UP CIDS AltDev

Additionally, support from civil society organizations and other groups has played a crucial role in alleviating the challenges faced by these communities. Among Indigenous peoples, the utilization of traditional sources of food, nutrition, and healthcare has emerged as a key component of their response strategy to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, Dr. Ed brought to light the four gaps in the alternative practices on ground. These are the following:

1. The practices are often marginal and confined to a narrow section of society. By definition, they are very far from urban or more developed areas.
2. They are largely disparate and disconnected. The communities engaged in these practices rarely talk with one another so they are not aware of the parallel efforts of other communities in Southeast Asia.

3. Research and documentation of these practices are lacking. We need to do more to make known these practices.
4. Lastly, it is not enough to narrate and document these empirical activities that are going on. Dr. Ed underscored the need to make sense of these practices and develop a theory/framework for new philosophies in development.

### *Towards a Southeast Asian Peoples' Alternative Regionalism*

It was highlighted that various organizations and networks collaborated to establish the Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia (MASSA) in January 2022. The term “Massa,” resonating with the meaning of “the people” or “the masses” in Filipino, Indonesian Bahasa, and Tetum (Bahasa Timor-Leste), reflects the collective nature of the movement. Since its inception in January 2022, MASSA is comprised of twenty-three civil society organization (CSO) partners and networks from countries, including the Philippines, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma/Myanmar, the Thai–Burma border, Laos, Malaysia, and Cambodia. It has been engaged in discussions with the primary objective of constructing an alternative model of regional integration.

MASSA articulated its goals, including the establishment of a comprehensive database of alternative practices through dedicated research and documentation efforts. Additionally, the movement aims to facilitate People-to-People (P2P) exchanges for sharing knowledge, as well as to popularize and mainstream alternative practices through workshops, conferences, and solidarity actions, leveraging social media platforms. Furthermore, MASSA seeks to build and strengthen solidarity among alternative development practitioners. It also aims to expand collaboration with groups both within and outside Southeast Asia, fostering networks that undertake similar efforts.

In alignment with the broader objective of Southeast Asian peoples' alternative regionalism, UP CIDS AltDev shared their contributions. Since 2018, UP CIDS AltDev has documented, published, and promoted fifty-six cases of alternative practices through social media, covering regions such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Malaysia, Cambodia, Burma/Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, the Thai–Burma border, and regional networks operating in Southeast

Asia. This collaborative effort marks a significant stride towards fostering alternative regional integration in Southeast Asia.

The session underscored the groundbreaking nature of the agenda for alternative peoples' regional integration. It acknowledged the historical challenges in translating the idea of an alternative regional network, which was discussed within the ACSC/APF, into tangible action. Emphasizing a departure from the top-down ASEAN model, the initiative aims to facilitate regional integration from the grassroots level, transcending mere engagement with the state and state-led regional bodies. The endeavor signifies a collective seizing of the future, relying on concerted efforts and drawing from the collective wisdom and resilience of the people involved.

The vision is to forge a new Southeast Asian peoples' movement grounded in principles of solidarity, cooperation, mutual benefit, and the commons. This shall foster judicious and responsible use of human and natural resources. This movement is committed to promoting peaceful and harmonious relationships with other peoples and with nature, with the overarching goal of serving as a model for other societies globally. The presentation concluded with a sense of determination to actualize this vision, recognizing its potential to inspire and guide movements beyond the Southeast Asian region.

## **For Women, by Women: Building Women Migrant Workers' Networks**

### ■ **Norm Sina**

*Gender and Development for Cambodia*

Norm Sina from Gender and Development for Cambodia presented "Building Women Migrant Workers' Networks," operating under the auspices of the TRIANGLE Project. As part of TRIANGLE in ASEAN, the project spans six countries—Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Laos—aiming to maximize the contribution of labor migration to equitable, inclusive, and stable growth in ASEAN. In Cambodia, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) actively work together to realize the project's goals and objectives.

The primary focus is on enhancing national and regional governance frameworks to protect migrant workers better. Moreover, women are argued to be less likely to have opportunities to engage in decision-making processes. By promoting the increased use of regular migration channels and ensuring greater returns for migrant workers, especially women, the project seeks to address gender inequalities and discrimination that currently limit women's opportunities in the migration landscape. Recognizing the challenges faced by women in the informal sector with limited labor protections and fewer options for regular migration, TRIANGLE in ASEAN aims to rectify these disparities.

The collaboration between the ILO and GADC centers around two key objectives. The first objective involves establishing a collective voice for migrant women's groups and fostering support within their communities. The stages of network building include commitment, sequential meetings, individual and community value creation, and the establishment of a symbiotic relationship where both the community and its network mutually reinforce and protect each other.

The second objective focuses on empowering the networks to address challenges and counter-isolating experiences of migration through amplifying the voices of women migrants in policy dialogues. Norm stated that the project enriches the enabling environment for migrant women's participation. This is possible through creating safer spaces, sharing experiences of gender inequality and discriminatory practices, and supporting women migrant workers' agendas and voices at the provincial level. The collaborative effort strives to create a transformative impact, ensuring that women in labor migration are not only protected but also empowered to shape the discourse surrounding their experiences actively.

The TRIANGLE initiative in ASEAN demonstrates a promising collaborative effort to address gender inequalities within the Southeast Asian migration landscape. By fostering collective action, empowering networks, and amplifying women's voices, this project paves the way for a future where women in labor migration are not only protected but also actively empowered to shape their own destinies. This transformative approach holds the potential to create a more equitable and inclusive regional migration framework, benefiting both women migrants and the communities they represent.

## Building an Inclusive, People-Centered Regionalism: The Homenet Experience

### ■ Josephine “Olive” Parilla

*PATAMABA-WISE and Homenet Philippines*

Olive Parilla from PATAMABA-Workers in the Informal Sector Enterprise (WISE) and Homenet Philippines shared insights into the Homenet experience, focusing on building inclusive, people-centered regionalism. Homenet Southeast Asia serves as a regional formation to unite Homenet organizations from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Both Homenet Philippines and PATAMABA-Wise are organizations that primarily represent workers in the informal economy, particularly home-based workers. Homenet Philippines stands as a national network that comprises twenty-seven local membership and community-based organizations (CBOs). Meanwhile, PATAMABA-WISE operates as a social solidarity economy organization based in the Province of Rizal.

Olive shed light on the challenges faced by HomeNet, ranging from hunger and health crises to unemployment and underemployment connected to unpaid care work, democratic deficits, extreme inequalities, widening digital divides, and the climate emergency. She then detailed the response and initiatives of marginalized voices and grassroots communities. These encompass actions such as conducting solidarity-based relief and recovery efforts, bridging the digital divide, forming savings and loan associations for livelihood recovery, shifting production to personal protective equipment (PPE) during COVID-19, and promoting health and wellness and food security through community-supported organic agriculture, community gardens, pantries, and kitchens.

Despite the pandemic, Homenet Philippines engaged in campaigns for just social assistance for informal workers. It advocated for the transition from informal to formal work and social solidarity actions, including cooperative housing. The organization emphasized the need for fair recovery and social protection for all informal workers, with a call for integrated and comprehensive social services from the government. Olive urged the importance of creating space within the government and organizing membership-based organizations of the poor to achieve meaningful change.



The presentation concluded by posing a crucial question to all participants: What concrete steps can be taken to build regionalism and possibly a global movement of alternatives? The suggested action points included organizing, awareness-raising, capacity-building, building relationships at local and international levels, knowledge-sharing through various channels, and maximizing the use of digital technology for networking. Olive concluded with a poignant quote from Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much,” emphasizing the strength and transformative potential of solidarity in the pursuit of inclusive and people-centered regionalism. She used this anecdote to emphasize the importance of solidarity, and to conclude the presentation she exclaimed, “Together we shall overcome and in solidarity we are strong.”

## Alternative Regionalism in the Perspective of the LGBTQIA+ Community

### ■ Lini Zurlia

*ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC)*

The presentation of Lini Zurlia from the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus centered on the theme “Alternative Regionalism in the Perspective of the LGBTQIA Community.” The ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC) is a regional organization dedicated to advocating for the human rights of LGBTQIA+ people in Southeast Asia. ASC’s operations are registered in Manila, Philippines, but extend across Southeast Asian countries.

Lini began their sharing by grounding the experience of the LGBTQIA+ community and its unique challenges across each ASEAN member-states. According to her, with the exception of Timor-Leste, many members of LGBTQIA+ community face gender discrimination due to the absence of inclusive constitutional provisions to safeguard their community (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, 2017).<sup>10</sup> In contrast, other member-states either possess criminal penal codes or lack legislation protecting

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<sup>10</sup> ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, *The Rainbow in Context: An Overview of the Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) Persons in Southeast Asia* (Quezon City: ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, 2017). <https://aseansogiecaucus.org/images/resources/publications/The%20Rainbow%20in%20Context%20-%20LGBTIQ%20Persons%20in%20SEA.pdf>

LGBTQIA+ rights. Commonalities persist in the perception of LGBTQIA+ individuals as foreigners. Moreover, compounding restrictions in the exercise of their gender expressions are worsened by religious and moral discrimination across ASEAN countries.

Lini also highlighted the systemic resistance against LGBTQIA+ communities, with some nations employing provisions in penal codes, such as Section 377 of the British colonial penal code or anti-sodomy laws, to criminalize LGBTQIA+ identities. In Myanmar, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore, Section 377, which is implemented in their respective penal codes, treats LGBTQIA+ individuals as criminals (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, 2017). These laws are often weaponized against those with diverse gender identities. Lini provided specific examples, such as Malaysia's law penalizing men dressing like women and the adoption of Brunei's penal code in one province of Indonesia. On one hand, there are no strict criminal laws against LGBTQIA+ people in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand, as long as they remain silent regarding their rights. On the other hand, advocating for rights might lead to government recognition as threats.

Lini then highlighted the absence of legal protections for LGBTQIA+ rights in ASEAN and the challenges faced by the community. The presentation emphasized the need for alternative regionalism as a collective approach to building a movement, given the shared experiences of discrimination and persecution faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals and other social justice and human rights defenders. Instances of arbitrary arrests, detentions, and violence were underscored, reinforcing the imperative for collaborative efforts in the pursuit of LGBTQIA+ rights within the ASEAN region.

## Open Forum 1

As a prelude to the open forum, Ryan Korbari summarized the four presentations, capturing the key insights shared by the speakers. Dr. Ed elucidated the mechanisms and practical applications of alternative regionalism. Meanwhile, Olive and Norm exemplified successful practices in their respective countries and the broader Southeast Asian context. The initiatives included women-to-women networks and food and farming projects. Additionally, Lini integrated LGBTQIA+ perspectives into the framework of alternative regionalism, showcasing the work of the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, formed in 2011, as an alternative network inclusive of and in solidarity with marginalized groups.

During the open forum, a participant from Cambodia inquired about strategies to promote gender equality and enhance inclusivity in gender advocacy efforts. Olive responded by sharing an impactful local SOGIE ordinance in Angono, Rizal, which was developed through consultations with LGBTQIA+ groups. Such a display of inclusivity highlighted the importance of not only safeguarding the rights of workers in the informal economy but also advocating for the acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community. Olive emphasized the role of gender advocates in championing comprehensive programs.

Deepak Dungal from Nepal raised a question regarding building better country coalitions and engaging CSOs in ASEAN communities. In response to this query, Dr. Ed underscored the need to recognize the limits of state power, emphasizing the weakness of several states in ASEAN. He encouraged to seek spaces where marginalized communities, grassroots organizations, CSOs, and people's organizations (POs) can operate independently. Trusting in the wisdom of grassroots people, Dr. Ed advocated for organizing, educating, strengthening, and agitating to unite the people and build a new society. Olive and Norm echoed the sentiment of solidarity for Southeast Asian people, emphasizing the importance of organizing and coming together for collective empowerment.

As the first workshop ended, the importance of trusting the wisdom of grassroots communities resonated through the room. This emphasis on community knowledge highlighted the need for collective action, education, and advocacy to lead us toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

## Workshop 2

# Stories From Below, Reinforcing Peoples' Alternatives

- **Luly Ketsana, Queer & Cheers Laos**  
*Moderator*

Before the second workshop commenced, Luly Ketsana of Queer & Cheers Laos gave a brief background on the situation of organizations in post-coup Myanmar. According to her, on 1 February 2021, indigenous peoples' organizations and community-based groups in Myanmar assumed prominent roles in spearheading the civil disobedience movement against the Junta, which aims to dismantle the existing power structure and instigate a transformative change within the state. Simultaneously, these organizations emerged as the lead coordinators for efforts both in and outside Myanmar and along its borders.

Building upon the discussions from the initial session, the second workshop focused on delving deeper into the experiences and direct actions of communities navigating crises, particularly those in Myanmar contending with the erosion of civil democratic institutions and the ascension of military authority. It featured a comprehensive situational analysis of indigenous peoples in Myanmar, shedding light on the integral players in the pro-democracy movement and broader political landscape.



■ Figure 2. Luly Ketsana explains the situation in post-coup Myanmar.

*Source: Ryan Martinez, UP CIDS AltDev*

The session emphasized the interconnected struggles for equality and self-determination. Furthermore, it underscored the way forward toward a human and dignified life, as showcased by the alternatives of holistic cross-border humanitarian assistance, peace house shelters, and defending workers' rights.

Before the second workshop started, the house rules were reiterated once again. Participants were reminded that all questions would be entertained and answered during the open forum, and that a Khmer-to-English translation would be provided for face-to-face participants. Once Luly finished announcing the house rules, Guangchunliu Gangmei was called to deliver her keynote presentation on post-coup Myanmar.

# Post-Coup Myanmar: Indigenous Peoples and Civil Society

## ■ Guangchunliu Gangmei

*Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)*

The discussions, involving representatives from CSOs, shed light on the priorities and key findings regarding the post-coup situation in Myanmar. These insights are crucial for both short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term development in the country, disseminating crucial insights about the situation.

According to Guangchunliu, a CSO representative, “Because we want to create a society with a community-based development model, and then federal democracy, decentralized, grassroots bottom-up approach, you should consider these things even in your short-term humanitarian assistance.” Emphasizing a community-based development model and a bottom-up approach to federal democracy, community representatives who had previously spoken with the AIPP expressed the need to align short-term humanitarian efforts with these foundational principles.

Based on consultations, dialogues, and research, the AIPP came up with the following key findings regarding the situation of post-coup Myanmar:

### 1. Deny Legitimacy to the Military Junta

The international community must reject any attempts to legitimize the State Administration Council (SAC), considering its actions amount to war crimes. The SAC’s deliberate targeting of civilians and obstruction of humanitarian aid reflect a longstanding pattern of human rights abuses against local communities and Indigenous peoples.

### 2. Support Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance

With over a million internally displaced people and the escalation of challenges, particularly in various regions and states, the international community should bolster support for cross-border humanitarian assistance facilitated through community-based civil society networks. This approach is deemed the most effective for addressing the pressing needs.

### **3. Recognize Indigenous CSOs for Effective Assistance**

Indigenous CSOs possess the knowledge and capacity to deliver rapid and effective humanitarian assistance. These organizations, deeply embedded in local communities, have gained trust by consistently providing support during critical times.

### **4. Respect Local Ethnic and Indigenous Institutions**

Any response to the political and humanitarian crisis must acknowledge and respect local ethnic and indigenous institutions, administrations, and governance structures. The decades-long development of these institutions, including customary land tenure systems, contribute significantly to the region's social fabric.

### **5. Prioritize Livelihood and Food Security**

The scale of the crisis necessitates prioritizing livelihood and food security for local communities and indigenous peoples. Strengthening grassroots and bottom-up institutions, including customary land and forest management systems, is vital to prevent a long-term food security crisis.

### **6. Address Urgent Food Crisis**

Urgent support is needed to address the spreading food crisis. Local initiatives facilitating the exchange and provision of food and livelihood aid must be supported. Customary land tenure systems are crucial for livelihood security in ethnic areas.

Guangchunliu underscored the importance of international organizations, deeply understanding and respecting the existence of practices and knowledge of local communities. The communities asserted their ownership of projects, emphasizing that they were not working for donor organizations but rather for the betterment of their own community. This holistic approach ensures that international interventions align with the needs, practices, and aspirations of the affected communities in Myanmar.

During the discussion, Guangchunliu mentioned that a strong sentiment emerged from the community representatives. This sentiment emphasized the importance of international organizations that immersed themselves deeply in local practices, knowledge, and wisdom of the community before engaging in any collaborative efforts. In solidarity with communities in Myanmar, the following recommendations were put forth based on a comprehensive analysis, aiming to guide both the affected communities and their collaborators:

### **1. Deny Legitimacy to the Military Junta**

According to the All Burma Indigenous Peoples Organization (2021), “Under no circumstances should the international community legitimise the military junta by engaging with them, inviting them to join any platforms or international events, or providing political or financial support.”

### **2. Support Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance**

Channel support for cross-border humanitarian assistance through established networks of ethnic and Indigenous civil society and CBOs, ensuring effective aid delivery.

### **3. Enhance Dialogue with Stakeholders**

Engage in a constructive dialogue with CSOs, ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs), ethnic consultative councils, and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) to better understand and respond to the evolving political context.

### **4. Advocate for Resource Moratorium**

Advocate for a moratorium on all new and incomplete large-scale natural resource investment projects by all stakeholders until relevant constitutions and legislations are adopted.

### **5. Empower Indigenous Peoples**

The All Burma Indigenous Peoples Alliance (2021) urges organizations to “[e]mpower and support Indigenous peoples to continue their role as stewards of the environment.” This helps in the effort to address the global climate



crisis by “recognising and supporting their customary governance” (All Burma Indigenous Peoples Alliance 2021) and management systems.

## **6. Support Needs Assessments**

Support community needs assessments facilitated by indigenous and ethnic CSOs and CBOs.

## **7. Foster Community-Based Strategies**

Utilize community-based needs assessments to aid indigenous peoples and local communities in developing their own strategies for strengthening and rebuilding local livelihoods, and community-based and customary land tenure systems.

## **8. Promote Research and Documentation**

Encourage community-based research and documentation on human rights and environmental justice issues.

## **9. Facilitate Advocacy**

Support indigenous and ethnic CSOs and CBOs in extending the reach of their advocacy through organizing and facilitating briefings and online fora with key decision-makers in the international community.

## **10. Address Accountability and Transparency**

Support initiatives by CSOs and CBOs to address accountability and transparency issues among ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and new political bodies, such as the National Unity Government (NUG), NUCC, and state and ethnic-based consultative councils.

## **11. Devolve Ownership and Management Powers**

Assist CSOs and CBOs in devolving ownership, control, and management powers over land on state and regional levels, allowing for bottom-up governance approaches to lead to genuinely federal land laws.

## 12. Provide Flexible Financial Support

Offer flexible financial support as part of three-year to five-year programs, ensuring sustained assistance.

## 13. Facilitate Capacity Building

Support indigenous and ethnic CSOs and CBOs in developing and facilitating trainings and courses on critical topics such as federalism, feminism, Indigenous rights, environmental administration, customary land and natural resource management, constitutional studies, and leadership.

Guangchunliu then illuminated the political turmoil in post-coup Myanmar, highlighting its detrimental impact on the quality of life of citizens. By analyzing their specific conditions and engaging in dialogue with stakeholders, AIPP developed comprehensive recommendations. These recommendations serve as guide for both affected communities and their collaborators, ensuring efforts align with the nuanced needs and aspirations of the local population.

# The Public Health Emergency and The Approach of the Civil Society in the Border Area

## ■ Dr. Cynthia Maung

*Mae Tao Clinic*

Dr. Cynthia Maung, representing the Mae Tao Clinic, provided a comprehensive overview of the health and emergency crisis in Myanmar during the workshop. The backdrop of this crisis, spanning over seventy years, has been characterized by military dictatorship, armed conflicts, economic dysfunction, political repression, and systematic oppression against ethnic minorities. The people of Myanmar aspire for the transformation of their nation into a peaceful society marked by economic development, democratic governance, and equality for all citizens. However, the prolonged military dictatorship has led to severe human rights violations, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country.

Dr. Maung highlighted key historical events that underscore the resilience and determination of the people of Myanmar to fight for a fair and just nation founded on democratic principles and human rights. These events include the ethnic armed resistance against the military, the 1962 student uprising, the 1988 uprising, the government's objection to the 1990 election, the 2007 Saffron Revolution, and the 2021 Spring Revolution. These historic events attest to the unwavering commitment of the people of Myanmar in advocating for a society where democracy thrives and human rights are guaranteed for all.

Emphasizing the shared values rooted in human rights, Dr. Maung asserted that civil societies bear a significant responsibility in the ongoing crisis. The primary focus is on advocating for the restoration of the elected government to power, the release of political prisoners, and ensuring the safe return of displaced individuals to an environment that is secure and conducive to peaceful coexistence.

## *On Health and Humanitarian Crises*

Dr. Maung described the situation in Myanmar related to COVID-19:

Myanmar faces multiple dire humanitarian crises whose roots are deeply political, manifesting through widespread oppression and human rights violations against civilians, particularly the ethnic peoples and other minorities of the country. Longstanding impunity and decades of unchecked abuses have already resulted in extensive displacement, poverty, and food insecurity, along with a protracted public health emergency.<sup>11</sup>

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs provided alarming statistics, revealing that, as of 31 October 2022, approximately 1.4 million people in Myanmar have been internally displaced. Of this staggering number, over 1.1 million individuals were displaced due to clashes and insecurity

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11 See Cynthia Maung, "An Answer to Global Crisis," in *2022 Gwangju Democracy Forum: An Answer to Global Crisis—Collaboration and Solidarity* (Gwangju, South Korea: The May 18 Foundation, 2022), 26–31, <http://2022gdf.518.org/en/file/0201.pdf>

following the coup, underscoring the immediate and severe impact of political turmoil on the civilian population.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) documented the severe toll of the military crackdown, reporting that 2,408 individuals, including pro-democracy activists and civilians, have lost their lives, and around 250 of the casualties are children. Additionally, 16,040 people have been arrested, with 12,830 currently under detention. These figures, verified by the AAPP, likely represent a conservative estimate, especially in ethnic administrative areas where accurate reporting faces additional challenges.

The ramifications of the military coup on Myanmar's healthcare efforts, particularly in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, were highlighted. The difficulties in accessing healthcare resources, predominantly felt in peripheral regions and ethnic areas, were also discussed. A preexisting network of ethnic health systems comprising over 200 health centers, which previously served approximately 700,000 people, faced challenges in addressing communicable diseases such as malaria and acute diarrhea.

The health system, already strained by the pandemic, witnessed further deterioration during the post-coup because of the civil disobedience movement and the arrests of health workers. Conflict-affected areas experienced compounded challenges, with airstrikes and intensified offensive attacks by the military, exacerbating the strain on the already fragile health infrastructure.

### *On Economic Impact*

Dr. Maung argued that “the economic impact of the pandemic and the military offensive was felt strongly by the poor and vulnerable.” She addressed the profound economic repercussions of the pandemic and military offensive in Myanmar, with a particular focus on the disproportionate impact on the poor and vulnerable segments of society. The closure of businesses and stringent border controls compelled the return of migrant workers to their villages. These exacerbated job insecurity and led to a cascading effect on families. The resultant economic strain has contributed to a concerning rise in child labor and a surge in school dropouts. Furthermore, the State Administration Council's restrictions severely impeded the flow of humanitarian aid to conflict-affected areas, necessitating a reevaluation of aid delivery mechanisms.

In response to the challenges posed by restricted access and a changing sociopolitical landscape, Dr. Maung emphasized the critical need for alternative ways of delivering aid grounded in the principles of “humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality.” An important proposal was made to “leverage existing channels, community networks, and local aid structures.” Some of these avenues have been operational “for over three decades.” This approach seeks to provide “humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable communities” in Myanmar.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Maung also highlighted the significance of local structures, emphasizing their ability “to adapt [their] programs to different contexts and cultures,” thereby “responding to the specific needs of each community in a culturally competent, trusted manner.” Beyond addressing the consequences of conflict, abuse, and displacement, these structures are instrumental in responding to new realities, such as controlling COVID-19 clusters and implementing preventive measures. In supporting such initiatives, flexibility is a key factor.

Dr. Maung acknowledged a notable movement among health professionals who, refusing to work within the military system, have initiated efforts to provide care independently. This has manifested in the establishment of mobile clinics and a robust network of health professionals committed to serving the community through their own clinics.

A collaborative network emerged in ethnic and conflict-affected areas, bringing together existing local health providers and health professionals who sought refuge in these regions. This collaboration aims to ensure the continuity of service provisions with a strong community focus, including capacity building for health workers, discussions on federal health policy, and advocacy for humanitarian aid delivery through cross-border networks. The ongoing strengthening of these networks involves the delivery of essential supplies, such as food, maternity and hygiene kits, and the mobilization of ambulance services. Importantly, psychosocial support services are now being extended to displaced and vulnerable individuals affected by the dual challenges of the pandemic and the military coup.

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12 Maung, “An Answer,” 27–28.

## *On Cross-border Options*

Dr. Maung centered on the imperative need for innovative approaches in Myanmar, particularly focusing on cross-border<sup>13</sup> options when necessary. Collaboration with ethnic health groups and civil society organizations is highlighted as a key strategy to efficiently safeguard the lives of the most vulnerable populations. Moreover, a dual emphasis is placed on protecting the public health of Burma's neighbors and the broader region through mitigating the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 and potential variants.

In conflict-affected areas, she underscored the successful establishment of access to life-saving essential services. A pronounced focus is placed on ensuring the safety of children, with a specific emphasis on community training to protect women and children from the grave threat of trafficking. Despite these achievements, there remains an urgent need to bring attention to the plight of displaced persons, refugees, women, and children living in dire conditions after fleeing their homes.

Furthermore, Dr. Maung acknowledged the challenges in providing essential services in a democratic setting, where the ideals of life-saving medical assistance, vaccination, safe housing, essential food, and clean water should be readily accessible. In a democratic country, the entire population should have unhindered access to essential health education, welfare, and protection. However, the reality is marred by difficulties in addressing these issues and bringing them to the forefront of higher-level discussions.

Dr. Maung then stressed the importance of addressing these challenges to uphold democratic principles. Advocating for life-saving medical assistance, vaccination campaigns, secure housing, and access to essential services is crucial to ensure the well-being of the population. She also emphasized the need for comprehensive health education, welfare, and protection for all citizens within a democratic framework.

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13 Cross-border approach entails collaborating with health and civil society organizations to save lives, protect public health in neighboring countries, and curb the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 and potential variants.

## *Solutions and Ways Forward*

According to Dr. Maung, the National Unity Government (NUG)—formed after the 2021 coup, comprising democratically elected representatives and enjoying widespread citizen support—should have been recognized as the legitimate authority. This acknowledgment set the stage for discussions on reinstating the paused peace process, prioritizing inclusive political reforms, and fostering active stakeholder engagement, guided by the values of federal democracy and equity.

An urgent appeal was made to the international community to actively support Myanmar's democratic processes and listen to the voices of citizens, conflict-affected populations, and democracy advocates. Emphasis was placed on rebuilding community structures, healthcare, education, and livelihood infrastructures as immediate priorities, underscoring the need for unrestricted humanitarian assistance during crises, independent of military influence.

Dr. Maung expanded the topic's focus by addressing the broader erosion of democratic values in Asia. Her call against normalizing this erosion emphasized the fragility of democracy, urging concerted efforts to build and strengthen civil society and social institutions. She concluded her speech by highlighting the pivotal role of empowering and educating the youth to champion inclusiveness, equality, peace, and democracy, and called on ASEAN to focus on strengthening civil society and empowering the youth to preserve democratic values and human rights in the region.

# The Plight of the Employees of NagaWorld

## ■ Chhim Sithar

*Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer (LRSU)*

Chhim Sithar discussed the ongoing strike of the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer (LRSU). Since December 2021, LRSU, representing the Nagaworld employees, has been on strike following the massive layoffs at NagaWorld. LRSU demands livable wages, humane working conditions, and the reinstatement of the dismissed workers

### *On the Suppression and Intimidation of Workers' Rights*

Chhim began her speech with a stark portrayal of the challenging landscape for workers' rights in Cambodia. She emphasized the parallel oppression instigated by both the government and employers. Highlighting the use of state-controlled media to discredit workers and threats from communal/village leaders, she shed light on the significant obstacles faced in organizing and expressing fundamental rights, such as the right to strike. Chhim said, "Our members are also being targeted by communal leaders. They meet our members at home and tell their parents not to allow their children to join the strike, citing it as a color revolution and deeming it illegal."

Additionally, state forces are deployed to intimidate participants of the strike and enforce strict policies to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, most especially quarantines. She commented further, "This strategy was utilized to imprison three of our members for violating these policies, representing a tactic commonly employed by businesses in Cambodia."

### *On Gender-Based Violence and Workplace Harassment*

Chhim then centered on the pervasive issue of gender-based violence and harassment within the workplace. She underscored the prevalent sexism and sexual harassment that women workers face, particularly in the service industry. Her narrative highlighted the significant role women played in union leadership through ensuring a safe space for discussion. The challenges of encouraging workers to speak up against harassment were outlined, highlighting resistance



from management. This underscored the necessity for a union to advocate for improved working conditions.

Over the years, NagaWorld workers have been told that being harassed is part of their job, and there is nothing they can do because these people are customers. Chhim commented that this has been very challenging for union leaders to explain to workers that they have to speak up, and that their situation is unacceptable. She expounded, “When workers are willing to speak up, then another challenge is to talk to the company, to demand them to take real actions against violence and harassment against workers.” It is one thing to persuade individuals to fight back against oppression, but it is a heavier task to pressure those in power to respect workers’ rights.

Chhim expounded, “We decided to exercise our lives for a union. In our union, we have been working very hard to improve the working conditions [and] to adjust our pay and address our safety.” Since then, the union has advocated for the collective workers’ rights, organizing the members, consolidating their demands, and representing them in negotiations with the NagaWorld management.

### *On the Ongoing Strike and Challenges Faced*

Chhim delved deeper into the protracted strike that commenced in December 2021, which by the time of the workshop, was over 10 months. She underscored the unyielding determination of the workers to address systemic issues plaguing their workplaces. She detailed the multifaceted challenges encountered during this period, highlighting the resistance faced by both the government and the company. The use of COVID-19 laws to stifle the strike emerged as a recurring tactic, with government departments employing these laws to curb workers’ protests and protect the interests of employers. The speaker pointed out how these entities, including the courts, police, Ministry of Labor, and Ministry of Health, seemingly stood in front of the company, utilizing COVID-19 restrictions as a tool to halt the strike.

Despite these challenges, Chhim underscored the unwavering commitment of the union to pursue justice for the workers. She delved into the complexities of the situation, revealing that the employers resorted to surveillance and intimidation, tracking and following the key leaders and members involved in the strike. This pervasive fear tactics resulted in a palpable sense of insecurity among the

workers on strike. Chhim's personal experience, being in prison for nine months simply because she was advocating for workers' rights, served as a poignant example of the sacrifices made in the pursuit of justice. The presentation ended on a resolute note, emphasizing that even in the face of adversity, the ongoing strike symbolizes a steadfast commitment to securing better working conditions and fair treatment for all workers in Cambodia.

The experiences and stories of NagaWorld employees brought to light the significance of the workers' fight for rights in Cambodia as a potential model for others. Despite the challenges, Chhim conveyed a sense of resilience and determination, emphasizing the need for solidarity and support from the international community. The union's struggle was positioned as a beacon of hope and inspiration for workers globally, encouraging them to stand up and fight for their rights.<sup>14</sup>

## Peace House Shelters in Vietnam

### ■ Vu Thi Minh Hang

*Vietnam Women's Union*

Hang opened with a comprehensive overview of the impact of COVID-19 on various facets of society, emphasizing the far-reaching consequences on health, education, gender issues, and social assistance. The data from the United Nations in Vietnam exposed the heightened vulnerability of women, with over thirty-

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14 Shortly after the ACSC/APF 2022, Cambodian authorities arrested Chhim on 26 November 2022 for "violating bail conditions on international travel." She had just returned from the World Congress of the International Trade Union Confederation. International and Cambodia-based human rights and labor unions condemned Sithar's arrest. See Amnesty International, "Cambodia: Casino Union Leader Chhim Sithar and Strikers Convicted," Amnesty International, 25 May 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/cambodia-casino-union-leader-chhim-sithar-and-strikers-convicted/>

MASSA echoed the call of Cambodian CSOs for the prompt release of Chhim, as expressed in the ACSC/APF 2022 Joint Statement. See Lawan, "Free Chhim Sithar! Uphold Workers' Rights in Cambodia! End Harassment of Union Activists!," Facebook, 1 December 2022, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=435504528787283&id=100069832179831&rdid=RMFUAKlZpqS26YD](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=435504528787283&id=100069832179831&rdid=RMFUAKlZpqS26YD)

nine percent of women experiencing physical and sexual violence during lockdowns and restrictions.

### *Peace House Shelters' Response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV)*

Hang shifted the focus to the commendable efforts of Peace House Shelters (PHS), which comprises three shelters: two in Hanoi and one in southern Vietnam. The objectives of PHS were outlined, emphasizing their commitment to implementing Vietnamese legislation on domestic violence and human trafficking. The target group, victims of gender-based violence (GBV), including those affected by human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual abuse, were identified. The following are some common characteristics of victims cared for by PHS:

- GBV negatively impacted the victims' physical and mental health.
- They lack safety or/and life skills, economy dependent, or are jobless.
- They require help and commit to working with the social worker following the process.

The presentation detailed the crucial three-tiered approach of PHS, which encompasses urgent, short-term, and long-term support for victims. The kinds of support provided to the victims within these identified categories were enumerated:

- Urgent: basic personal needs, health and psychology support, safe accommodation, legal support;
- Short term: health care, legal aid, psychology support, reintegration support;
- Long term: continuing support for legal aid, healthcare, financial support, education support, career orientation, job placement, and family support.

Furthermore, the house center ensures that social integration ensue after victims return from the shelter. Peace house shelters provide twenty-four-hour safe accommodation, healthcare services, counseling support, legal aid, life skills, and vocational training.

Another noteworthy aspect of PHS's resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted, showcasing its strategic adaptation to the challenges posed by the crisis. By utilizing internet and phone counseling sessions, PHS ensured continued support for victims while adhering to national epidemic prevention guidelines. Hang underscored the importance of maintaining the Hotline 1900 969680 via social media for effective interaction and support during social distancing. Collaboration with service providers and adherence to principles such as zero discrimination and prioritizing safety were also emphasized.

PHS follows these main principles and approaches to prioritize the safety and protection of women and children:

1. Zero discrimination, with special attention to vulnerable groups, **entails** having confidence in the problem-solving capacity of survivors of GBV;
2. Respect, acceptance, and empowerment, especially with privacy and confidentiality; and
3. Upholding key responsibilities of government and relevant stakeholders in response to GBV.

Hang also delved into the achievements of PHS, such as supporting 2,039 victims from fifty cities and provinces, representing seventeen ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, eighty percent of the clients had a successful and sustainable reintegration with society. Although, despite the PHS successes, Hang acknowledged that there were challenges faced by the shelters too. The challenges outlined are the following:

- Lack of human resources: high risks, facing perpetrators, limited support policies for staff and social workers;
- Social restrictions: limited and delayed several support and client services in remote areas;

- Funding: insufficient budget for responding to COVID-19 and self-isolation for positive cases;
- Reintegration: clients who returned to their localities may not easily access job opportunities and loans; education programs are closed or delayed because clients do not have laptops/computers to access online training.

The presentation concluded with a set of recommendations that emphasized the need for research and evaluation of COVID-19 impacts on GBV response, strategies for resource allocation, knowledge-sharing with other countries, organizational capacity building, and pilot models for effective victim support. The call to action resonated with the importance of continuous learning and adapting to emerging challenges in the realm of GBV response, both during and after the pandemic.

## Open Forum

During the open forum, a question was raised concerning the challenges faced by NagaWorld workers. Chhim addressed the inquiry and shed light on the pressing struggle the workers faced.

### *On the Struggle and Collective Action*

Chhim emphasized the profound need to protect the workers' voices. She underscored the necessity to persist in their ongoing strike. Despite facing challenges, she highlighted the union's active role in organizing and representing its members involved in the strike. The union continues to engage in negotiations with the company, amplifying the workers' collective demands for livable wages and improved working conditions.

She also extended a call for support from other units, particularly from the public. She emphasized the importance of discussing and sharing the workers' issues on social media platforms, recognizing the potential and the far-reaching impact of such collective efforts. No further questions were raised following the initial inquiry.

## Conclusion

The second workshop concluded with a group picture, symbolizing the unity and solidarity among the participants. After echoing a call for support, the participants then returned to the main hall, marking the end of the session for Day 1. Workshops 3 and 4, which aimed to tackle people-to-people exchange, would be hosted on the following day, 4 November 2022.

Day 2

# Workshops 3 and 4

## Convergence Space on Alternative Regionalism, ACSC/APF 2022

*4 November 2022*

*1:00 PM to 4:00 PM (Cambodia Time)*

Building on the foundations of alternative regionalism and grassroots stories from the previous day, Workshops 3 and 4 delved into the vital themes of cross-border solidarity and people-to-people exchange. Following these insightful sessions, Chandy Eng of Gender and Development Cambodia (GADC) gathered recommendations from the discussions in Workshop 3. Meanwhile, Lini Zurlia of ASC and Asst. Prof. Mon Sy of UP CIDS AltDev facilitated a planning session after Workshop 4, inviting participants to translate and consolidate their learnings into concrete initiatives for future people-to-people interactions.

The third workshop explored the powerful concept of intersectionality within the context of cross-border solidarity. Delfia Pereira Usboco of Manufahi Peasant Union Timor-Leste shared valuable insights on agrarian reform, highlighting the need to empower women and challenge patriarchal norms regarding land rights. Chhorn Sokuntheam of the Cambodian Center for Independent Media made a powerful call for international support for journalists and media freedom. Srurn Srurn of Cambodia ASEAN (CAM Asean) further emphasized the crucial role of cross-border solidarity in achieving lasting change. Finally, Cipriano Fampulme

of Aksyon sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima<sup>15</sup> concluded the session with a call to protect and expand civic spaces across the region.

The fourth workshop provided a platform for Southeast Asian speakers to share their experiences and insights on people-to-people exchanges. The first speaker, Anwar “Sastro” Ma’ruf from Konfederasi Pergarakan Rakyat Indonesia, set the stage with his inspiring perspectives. Next, Dr. Ed, Convenor of UP CIDS AltDev, offered valuable insights. Finally, Vasudha Varadarajan, representing Vikalp Sangam, concluded the session with her organization’s experiences and vision for future collaborations. Each speaker was given ten minutes to share their thoughts, sparking lively discussions and connections among participants.

To ensure a respectful and productive dialogue, the following house rules were displayed on the screen:

- All questions were to be entertained during the open forum of the workshop.
- For face-to-face or F2F participants: Khmer to English translation would be provided.
- For online participants: questions could already be posted in the chat box as speakers shared.

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15 “Aksyon sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima” translates to “Action for the Preparation of Calamity and Climate” in English.





## Workshop 3

# Intersectionality and Cross-border Solidarity

- **Chandy Eng, Gender and Development  
Cambodia (GADC)**  
*Moderator*

The third workshop delved into intersectionality and cross-border solidarity. Chandy Eng of GADC kicked off the session with the playful “Peel Banana Dance,” and invited both in-person and Zoom participants to dance. Before diving into the discussion, she emphasized the workshop’s central theme: “What is intersectionality, and how does it shape alternative regionalism through cross-border solidarity?”

Urging active participation, Chandy encouraged everyone to share their insights and experiences, thereby weaving them into a rich tapestry that would complement the speaker’s perspectives. Chandy also reminded the participants that everyone has the chance to ask questions during the open forum. The goal of the workshop was to collaboratively craft recommendations for governments and civil society.



■ Figure 3. Workshop 3 panel speakers in one frame. (From left to right: Delfia Pereira Usboco, Chandy Eng, Chhan Sokunthea, Srun Srorn, and Cipriano Fampulme)  
Source: Ryan Martinez, UP CIDS AltDev

To provide a springboard for the speakers, Chandy offered her personal understanding of intersectionality. “It’s about recognizing how multiple identities, like being LGBTQIA+, elderly, or belonging to a certain faith, can intertwine and shape individual experiences,” she explained. Likewise, as she added, “Cross-border solidarity, meanwhile, demands peaceful unity across borders, recognizing that we’re all interconnected—a principle even more crucial in the face of challenges like COVID-19.”

### ■ **Delfia Pereira Usboco** *Manufahi Peasant Union Timor-Leste*

Delfia Pereira Usboco, representing the Manufahi Peasant Union in Timor-Leste, underscored the paradoxical situation faced by women. While women can ascend to roles such as prime ministers and contribute to administrative forces, obstacles emerge when discussing agrarian reform, particularly in accessing land. She shed light on the persistence of patriarchal norms, where the belief that women would acquire land only after marriage prevails. Delfia emphasized

the need to recognize women as equals, deserving of respect and rights, urging collective organization and advocacy to overcome these challenges.

Furthermore, Delfia stressed the imperative for the organization to actively engage in altering societal mindsets. This involves empowering individuals to support women in claiming their rights and breaking free from ingrained gender norms. She passionately advocated for a shift away from the perception that women are confined to domestic roles, asserting their right to influence cultural decisions, association, and accessibility.

Highlighting the broader context, Delfia contended that building solidarity within Timor-Leste serves as the initial step towards integration into the ASEAN community. Acknowledging agriculture as integral to life itself, she called for collective efforts to champion its cause. Delfia proposed solidarity as a cornerstone in preparing for agricultural system reform and advocated for addressing these concerns with the ASEAN government as part of a comprehensive solution.

In conclusion, Delfia provided invaluable insights into the multifaceted challenges faced by women in agrarian reform. Her call for collective action and emphasis on solidarity within Timor-Leste and the broader ASEAN region were particularly noteworthy. She also underscored the pivotal role of unity in achieving gender equality and addressing critical agricultural issues.

In response to Delfia, Chandy acknowledged the impact of patriarchy during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in human rights violations and challenges to democracy. As she introduced the next speaker, she posed the question, “How does peoples’ solidarity move forward?”

## ■ Chhan Sokunthea

*Cambodian Center for Independent Media*

Chandy’s question on solidarity was intended for the next speaker to discuss the importance of solidarity in addressing certain issues and to link it with the broader context of neoliberalism in Cambodia and ASEAN. Chhan Sokunthea focused on the challenges faced by the media in Cambodia and the broader global implications, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. She highlighted the

profound impact of the pandemic on global connectivity and expressed concern about the immediate implementation of rules and regulations by the Cambodian government without proper consultation with relevant stakeholders.

One of the primary challenges outlined by Chhan was the restricted access to information faced by independent media, due to political bias. She emphasized the crucial role of independent journalists in bridging the gap between CSOs and the government, especially during lockdowns when media access to information was curtailed.

The narrative delved into the collaborative efforts of journalists in cross-border solidarity, emphasizing the sharing of information and ensuring accurate coverage of real issues on the ground. Chhan detailed how the movement of journalists worked together to transcend barriers imposed during lockdowns, reaching out to areas in the red zone and lock zone.

In addressing the challenges and restrictions imposed by the government, Chhan highlighted the significance of joining solidarity with other independent media organizations. She stressed that such collaborations enabled the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) to persist on its work, ensuring the dissemination of information despite adversities.

Furthermore, Chhan discussed the importance of supporting the people's movement on digital rights. She proposed the active involvement of people and stakeholders in the formulation of internet laws and regulations within the ASEAN region as a means to safeguard digital freedoms.

In conclusion, Chhan's presentation provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by independent media in Cambodia, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her insights into collaborative efforts, solidarity initiatives, and the imperative to involve stakeholders in shaping digital regulations underscored the resilience and determination required to navigate through adversities and uphold the principles of independent journalism.

## ■ Cipriano Fampulme

### *Aksyon sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima*

Cipriano Fampulme, representing the Aksyon sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima, opened his speech by emphasizing the importance of accountability and the involvement of local leadership in all undertakings. In 2005, he formed the Urban Poor Alliance (UP-ALL) as a collaborative movement comprising people's organizations (POs) and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) advocating for reforms in socialized housing and basic services for urban poor communities, particularly informal settlers.

As a platform, UP-ALL aims to address issues, propose solutions, and analyze challenges faced by the urban poor sector. Cipriano proceeded to mention that the most valuable resource in District 5 of Quezon City is its people. He asserted their right to basic human needs, decent standard of living, and equal development opportunities.

Cipriano introduced the concept of intersectionality as a means of driving change through power shifting, promoting leadership, and empowering community members. He then underscored the need to protect civic space during the pandemic, and highlighted the launch of the Human Rights Defender Network—a multisectoral grassroots organization advocating for human rights, democracy, and dignity of life in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. He further emphasized the need for a collective that would protect human rights, sharing his personal experience of being red-tagged as a communist and terrorist.

Addressing challenges faced during the pandemic, Cipriano discussed the government's military approach and its impact on labor unions, factories, and communities. He emphasized the community's accountability, encouraging them to act as investors, utilizing their knowledge, skills, networks, and financial resources to amplify their voices, combat fake news, and counter disinformation.

Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of partnership-building, networking, and influencing decision-makers on the ground. Cipriano also emphasized that enabling and responding to grassroots movements is essential to address people's issues, challenging the notion of letting ASEAN leaders solely lead the way. He expressed concern over the meager housing budget, currently at 0.8 percent of the national budget, and called for a strong movement from POs

to exert pressure on the government for an automatic housing budget allocation per year.

Bringing UP-ALL's initiatives to a broader audience, Cipriano raised awareness of the diverse struggles faced by urban poor communities, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. His emphasis on accountability, intersectionality, civic space protection, and grassroots empowerment underscored the urgency of collective action to bring about societal change.

## ■ **Srun Sorn**

*Cambodia ASEAN (Cam ASEAN)*

Srun Sorn from Cam ASEAN shed light on the crucial role of intersectionality and cross-border solidarity in addressing issues of discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community. He emphasized that intersectionality extends its reach to encompass various groups. These include people with disabilities, elders, indigenous individuals, and even monks in Cambodia, challenging societal expectations regarding monks' conformity to a specific gender and sexual orientation.

Srun underscored the broader scope of cross-border connections, which extend beyond individual relationships to form larger alliances and networks within the region. He highlighted the importance of engaging individual similarities in building collective strength, emphasizing that initiating change requires collaboration at a regional level. Cross-border actions and support, according to Srun, should manifest in the form of solidarity talks that represent all people, without singling out any specific country in Southeast Asia. The objective is to raise awareness at the grassroots level, paving the way for advocacy efforts directed toward governments.

To demonstrate intersectionality, Srun shared examples of exhibitions that showcase diverse perspectives, breaking down stereotypes and fostering understanding. He emphasized the need for proactive measures, stating that waiting for the government to take action is not sufficient. Instead, he called for a collective effort, emphasizing the importance of creating groups dedicated to advocating for human rights and democracy.

Additionally, Srun highlighted specific initiatives that showcase the diverse ways in which intersectionality can be expressed and promoted. These initiatives include song compositions tailored for agriculture to connect with the farmer movement. He also encouraged communities in different countries, such as Malaysia and India, and various LGBTQIA+ groups, like those in Thailand, to support each other as part of a broader network.

Srun's presentation centered on the transformative power of intersectionality and cross-border solidarity in addressing discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community. His call for collective action, inclusive initiatives, and the promotion of awareness at the grassroots level resonated as essential steps toward fostering human rights, democracy, and a more inclusive society in the Southeast Asian region.

## Open Forum

After the discussants gave their own takes on the essential role of intersectionality and cross-border solidarity in challenging societal norms and stereotypes, as well as promoting alternative regionalism, Chandy moved on to the open forum session. Thirty minutes were dedicated for participants to pose questions and share their thoughts.

The open forum session provided a platform for engaging in discussions and fostering connections among participants from different organizations and regions. The session served as a testament to the importance of collaborative dialogue in advancing the principles of intersectionality and cross-border solidarity within the context of regionalism.

Some of the online participants introduced themselves and gave comments about the session.

Online participant Deepak Dhungel from AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) initiated the session, introducing himself as the Regional Advocacy and Marketing Manager in Nepal. He acknowledged the importance of grassroots movements and emphasized that addressing issues requires active involvement from the ground level. Another participant, Hans Tabiola, a researcher of UP CIDS AltDev, extended greetings to Deepak.



Angging Aban, also a researcher of UP CIDS AltDev, expressed admiration for the inspiring inputs from grassroots leaders and underscored the significance of alternative regionalism from below for the ACSC/APF.

Deepak concurred with the emphasis on grassroots movements. He highlighted the ineffectiveness of top-down planning on behalf of the poor, and stressed that real solutions arise from empowering those at the grassroots level.

Ryan Silverio of the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC), in a reflective comment, spoke about how intersectionality challenges LGBTQIA+ organizations to deepen their understanding, analyses, and alliances with various thematic groups. This highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach in addressing diverse issues within the LGBTQIA+ community.

## ***On the Challenges of the LGBTQIA+ Community for Cam ASEAN***

Ze from Timor Leste asked Cam ASEAN about the challenges that the LGBTQIA+ communities faced. In response, Srun acknowledged that LGBTQIA+ individuals face different problems in each country, and various organizations adopt distinct strategies to address these challenges. Srun underscored that being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community could lead to severe consequences, such as being subjected to violence and dehumanization.

In Malaysia, Srun pointed out the existence of a law that can result in imprisonment for individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. In Cambodia, the challenges manifest differently, with LGBTQIA+ individuals needing to adhere to specific orders and restrictions, including limitations on their gender expression in public spaces.

Srun also shed light on the corrupt practices within law enforcement, particularly police officers exploiting the LGBTQIA+ community for financial gain. The establishment of the LGBTQIA+ movement was discussed in the context of addressing these challenges, indicating a need for advocacy and support.

Furthermore, it was emphasized that the struggles faced by the LGBTQIA+ community are not solely due to government actions but also involve sociocultural pushback. Homophobic and transphobic attitudes are not solely

attributed to government policies but are deeply rooted in the beliefs and societal norms of the general population.

### ***On Building Solidarity in Housing Rights, Land Reform, the LGBTQIA+ Community, and Independent Media***

Jerald highlighted the crucial need for building solidarity in various key areas, including housing rights, land reform, the LGBTQIA+ community, and independent media. He raised the question of how to establish solidarity for standard settings in these critical domains, and stressed the importance of inclusivity in discussions, particularly in engaging the government and ASEAN.

Cipriano responded by emphasizing the community's perspective. He stated that housing is a basic human right and should fall under the purview of basic social feminism according to the government. However, he noted that this is not the reality on the ground. Cipriano proposed a novel approach to housing through a people's planning process, where the community leads the decision-making, including hiring engineers and architects for the project. The government's role is limited to providing technical and financial support.

Cipriano also highlighted the strong start of the people's planning project, showcasing a substantial budget allocation of ₱50 billion between 2010 to 2016. This significant investment led to positive outcomes for many communities. However, a sharp decline in funding, starting in 2016, painted a different picture. The reduced budget presented growing challenges for informal families, especially under the Duterte administration's rule.

Beyond mere funding cuts, Cipriano expressed deep concern about the worsening human rights situation in the country. The administration's neglect of basic social services, increased militarization, human rights violations, and unprecedented extrajudicial killings demand a strong response from civil society and grassroots organizations.

Contributing to the discussion, Ryan Silverio of ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, an online participant, said that the right to housing is often sidelined, even in the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) agenda. He advocated for joint advocacy in standard-setting, which shall be fostered intersectionally. This approach shall consider the housing issues faced by the LGBTQIA+

community, such as being kicked out of homes by their families, lack of safe shelters, and discrimination in access to public housing.

Srun shared insights from the LGBTQIA+ perspective, discussing the creation of a museum that tells the stories of the LGBTQIA+ community. He highlighted the importance of engaging neighbors and families, encouraging them to visit the museum to build solidarity. Srun also emphasized the need to listen, strike common ground with the larger masses, and showcase that everyone faces problems. He hoped this sharing would inspire connection and story-sharing among Southeast Asian countries, motivating them to eliminate discrimination.

### *On the Regional Access to Life-Saving Drugs*

Deepak expressed concerns about the apparent reluctance of respective governments to heed community voices and grassroots advocacy. After commending Timor-Leste for its exemplary provisions regarding LGBTQIA+ issues within the ASEAN community, he then highlighted a critical issue faced by individuals with chronic diseases. Deepak noted that those requiring daily medication may encounter challenges when traveling to another country, potentially resulting in missing their life-saving drugs.

Advocating for regional collaboration to address this issue, Deepak called for the involvement of CSOs to amplify community voices and encourage governments to listen. He specifically raised a question about individuals living with HIV and AIDS. While their country provides free prescription drugs, migrants without legal status are not entitled to such support. Deepak sought insights on whether regional collaboration could play a role in addressing this disparity.

Contributing to the discussion, Ryan S. proposed a strategy of lobbying respective governments within the ASEAN region to conduct Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs) that recommend actions on critical issues, such as access to life-saving drugs. Meanwhile, Silverio emphasized the importance of South-to-South and people-to-people advocacy. He also noted that organizations usually approach the European Union or North American states when lobbying for UPR recommendations.

One of the principles of UPRs is the promotion of the universality, interdependence, indivisibility, and interrelatedness of all human rights. Ryan

S. argued that universal healthcare in the Southeast Asian Region, particularly access to life-saving drugs, should be actively promoted under the UPR framework. This approach aims to ensure that every individual, regardless of citizenship or current place of residence, can access necessary healthcare to maintain their well-being.

### ***On Timor-Leste Joining ASEAN and Generalizability of Issues Raised in ACSC/APF***

A participant raised thought-provoking questions regarding Timor-Leste's perspective on joining ASEAN, emphasizing the importance of identifying commonalities in issues faced by the general public. After highlighting Timor-Leste's acceptance into ASEAN, she posed the question of whether the people of Timor-Leste genuinely looked forward to being part of the ASEAN community. The participant then stressed the significance of cross-border and intersectionality in addressing issues, suggesting a shift towards more community-centered concerns rather than focusing solely on country-specific matters. Emphasizing the need for empathy and responsibility towards every individual, she encouraged articulating issues from various sectors and putting a human face on real challenges.

Delfia, sharing insights from Timor-Leste, highlighted the necessity of building solidarity within the country before becoming an ASEAN member. She recounted an instance where a municipality faced agricultural challenges, and through a conference, they provided mutual support. Delfia then underscored the role of democracy in influencing government decisions but emphasized the obligation to advocate for change. She outlined ongoing efforts to organize municipalities, foster solidarities, and establish an organization that would advocate for farmers' rights. Delfia also envisioned ASEAN membership as an opportunity to enhance preparedness and collaboration with other agricultural organizations, ultimately contributing to regional food security and solidarity.

Elizabeth, representing CSOs, acknowledged the limited power to influence government decisions in Timor-Leste. She stressed the crucial role of people-to-people exchange and information dissemination by civil society in promoting awareness among ordinary citizens.

Additionally, Ryan S. expressed hope in Timor-Leste's potential role as a beacon for LGBTQIA+ rights advancement in the region, noting the country's support for UN resolutions on SOGIESC. He expressed optimism that if Timor-Leste were to become an ASEAN member, it could challenge the existing status quo and further advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights within the broader ASEAN context.

### *On Using Digital Platforms to Promote Advocacies*

Chandy initiated the discussion on the digital landscape to help people better understand the complexity of the digital world.

Chhan responded by emphasizing the potential of digital platforms to connect people globally without the need for physical travel. She highlighted that although there are challenges in internet freedom, particularly in Cambodia the internet is a crucial gateway to connect people. Chhan also elaborated on efforts in countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia to counter laws attempting to control social media. These regulations, she noted, aim to restrict people's movements.

Moreover, Chhan shared the experience of using social media to share issues and information among ASEAN nations, emphasizing the importance of uniting people across the region. She outlined the objective of leveraging digital platforms to enable ASEAN citizens to come together, lobby, and exert pressure on regional leaders. The ultimate goal is to influence ASEAN leaders and foster a more open space for free expression.

## Synthesis on Critical Issues Raised During the Open Forum

Angging Aban of UP CIDS AltDev took the floor to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the discussion and ideas exchanged during the open forum. She expressed her inspiration, particularly regarding the emphasis on incorporating images and stories into the framework of solidarity and cross-border people-to-people action and support.

Angging proceeded to share the impactful story of Delphia, underscoring the solidarity within peasant unions in Timor-Leste engaged in land occupation. Delphia and other leaders played pivotal roles in advocating for agrarian reform and implementing land distribution after Timor's independence, exemplifying people-to-people solidarity and cross-border regionalism. Angging highlighted the connections between Timor-Leste's peasant unions and counterparts in Thailand, specifically mentioning Sastro of Serikat Petani and their shared experiences in West Java.

Shifting focus to Sithar's insights, Angging discussed trade union protests as a viable alternative against capitalist takeovers and global market hegemony in the region. She pointed out the resilience of women factory workers in Myanmar, who bravely protested against the military junta. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these workers forged powerful solidarity, both online and across borders, that served as an impetus to significant humanitarian responses.

Angging then delved into Srun's contributions to Cam ASEAN, emphasizing that the discussion extended beyond advocacy for LGBTQIA+ rights and gender justice. Srun actively engages in organizing LGBTQIA+ groups at the community level, connecting these efforts to broader class interests and underscoring the importance of collective action.

Reflecting on the people's plan discussion, Angging acknowledged the resilience of urban poor communities facing violent demolitions over time. Drawing parallels with experiences in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, she highlighted the persistent efforts to advocate for policies aligned with the people's plan. This collaborative policy generation involves partnerships with technical professionals, like architects and engineers, demonstrating solidarity and cross-border initiatives in Cambodia and Thailand.

Following Angging's insightful synthesis, the plenary session transitioned into generating recommendations for CSOs and governments. Chandy emphasized that one of the workshop's goals was to gather participant recommendations for both government and CSOs consideration, specifically focusing on how intersectionality and cross-border solidarity could foster inclusive governance.

On-site participants were divided into two groups, while online attendees formed the third group. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, the on-site participants' discussions were not audible from the recordings.

Srun, serving as the rapporteur for the first group, presented their recommendations. For CSOs, the group proposed identifying or utilizing the best practices of a CSO/NGO in one country on intersectionality and inviting others in Southeast Asia to participate. Additionally, they suggested sharing stories through direct channels such as arts, music, and education. Regarding governments, their recommendation was to establish a subregional committee based on the best practices of one country to engage others in Southeast Asia.

Chhan, representing the second group, conveyed their recommendations. They urged governments to review and amend the ASEAN chapter, specifically focusing on the article on noninterference. Additionally, they called for recognition of the legitimacy of CSOs and CBOs in partnership. For CSOs, their recommendation was to build a strong movement and solidarity among ASEAN CSOs.

During the breakout session in Zoom, Hans Tabiola of UP CIDS AltDev summarized the two main points derived from their discussion. The first point emphasized the need to identify common cross-border campaigns, recognize adversaries, and advance issues related to defending civic space, accessing safe housing, economic justice, and gender equality. The second point highlighted the importance of institutionalizing intersectional practices.

Due to time constraints, Chandy, as the moderator, signaled the end of the open forum. The third workshop concluded with participants instructed to move to the next room for the fourth workshop.

## Workshop 4

# Strengthening Alternative Regionalism

## Through the People-to-People Exchange between South and Southeast Asian Alternative Practitioners

- **Lini Zurlia, ASEAN Sogje Caucus (ASC)**  
*Moderator*

Before delving into the insights of the keynote speakers, Lini initiated an interactive session by asking the participants to share their own definitions of people-to-people exchange. Acknowledging that the concept might be new to some, Lini emphasized that its principles have been ingrained in our practices for quite some time. As a prompt, she asked this question, “What crosses your mind when you hear the words people-to-people exchange?” Several participants shared their perspectives, highlighting the essence of learning from one another, sharing challenges, issues, experiences, resources, and opportunities, as well as building networks and alliances across borders.



After setting the tone with participant perspectives, the moderators transitioned into the main discussion. The speakers were then invited to share their insights, deepening the conversation on what people-to-people exchange entails. Each keynote presenter was allocated ten minutes to provide valuable thoughts and experiences. Additionally, Mon announced that the upcoming fourth workshop would be followed by a planning session for the next year and subsequent activities.

Providing context for the audience, Mon recalled that the first P2P took place in 2019 in a peasant community in West Java, Indonesia, hosted by Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP). Attendees hailed from the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, and various parts of Indonesia. Consequently, Mon introduced Sastro, the first presenter, as someone who actively participated in the inaugural P2P exchange.

## *First Presenter*

### ■ **Anwar “Sastro” Ma’ruf**

*Konfederasi Pergarakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI)*

In 2019, the P2P exchange unfolded within a vibrant community located in West Java. This community, adorned with a school, proximity to a beach, and a pathway to the fields, provided a rich backdrop for the participants, to be deeply immersed in the daily life of the village and the activities of the Peasant Union. According to Sastro, visiting the village office made the participants realize the importance of direct engagement with other peoples of Southeast Asia, fostering solidarity and collaborative platform-building.

Sastro emphasized the significance of documentation and analysis, particularly in understanding how alternative development manifests on the ground. He exemplified this through the challenge of developing a sustainable light source for a village, emphasizing the importance of managing and maintaining the potential discovered during the process. The central theme revolved around transformation, acknowledging that the critical challenge lies in navigating and driving transformative change for the future of the people in Asia.

Calling for community summits that run parallel to presidential and ministerial summits, Sastro then underscored the imperative for community involvement

in decision-making processes. The digital transformation was also brought into focus, with an emphasis on showcasing community products on people-to-people markets. The potential for a progressive exchange lies in solidarity extending beyond mere messages, evolving into educational initiatives that deepen the understanding of community development by different communities.

Finally, Sastro concluded by highlighting the crucial need for distributing and transforming the knowledge and experiences gained from grassroots efforts over the years. Looking forward, he urged participants to explore possibilities, leverage technology more effectively, enhance participation and expand memberships, as well as forge alliances and networks across regions. Reflecting on the 2019 experience, he stressed the importance of living with host organizations and communities, immersing oneself in their realities, struggles, and leadership dynamics to glean valuable insights and contribute meaningfully to the shared goals of the exchange.

## *Second Presenter*

### ■ **Prof. Eduardo “Ed” Tadem, Ph.D.**

*Convenor, UP CIDS AltDev*

Dr. Ed commenced his discourse by contextualizing his insights within the framework of people-to-people relations, drawing on his previous studies conducted in 2008 and 2012. The first focal point centered on reimagining international relations, challenging conventional studies that predominantly view international relations through the lens of state-to-state or government-to-government linkages. Emphasizing the vital role played by nonstate actors, grassroots, CSOs, and social movements, he underscored their often-overlooked contributions to international relations. The democratization of international relations, involving nonelite and popular interactions at regional and global levels, was identified as a key element. This highlighted the need for people-to-people relations as a transformative force.

In his 2012 study, Dr. Ed delved into the concept of grassroots democracy, aligning it with people-to-people exchanges. He illuminated discourses on grassroots democracy, shedding light on the various dimensions of popular participation, including engagement in institutional avenues such as elections

and local government issues. Grassroots democracy, often associated with social movements and people's organizations, was explored from a less state-centric perspective, focusing on participatory governance and empowerment at the community level. Dr. Ed articulated that grassroots democracy is not inherently tied to the state, offering a nuanced view that encompasses community mobilization, popular democracy, and participatory decision-making.

The discourse ventured into an alternative dimension of grassroots democracy, exploring how marginalized communities historically managed their economic and political lives outside formal systems of governance and economics. The informal sector, encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, was described as old but resilient. In the contemporary era, efforts by marginalized communities to unilaterally take control of land and create viable social, political, and economic communities outside established legal processes were observed. Meanwhile, Dr. Ed lamented the patronizing agenda of modernizing societies and some change-oriented groups that hinder efforts to develop sustainable alternatives.

In conclusion, Dr. Ed advocated for the advancement of grassroots democracy through active participation in democratic decision-making processes facilitated by people-to-people exchanges. The discourse provided a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of international relations and grassroots democracy, challenging traditional paradigms and urging a reevaluation of alternative, community-centered approaches.

## *Third Presenter*

### ■ **Vasudha Varadarajan**

*Vikalp Sangam (VS)*

Vikalp Sangam (VS), a vibrant network of over eighty organizers, embodies the spirit of people-to-people exchange. Dedicated to gender equality, queer rights, sustainable agriculture, and advocacy for fair development, VS stands as a powerful force. Inspired by the ongoing struggles against inequality and exploitation across India, it envisions a brighter future through alternative practices, collaboration, and collective action. As Vasudha, one of the organizers, explains, VS arose from the countless voices of resistance who refuse to be silenced by statist, patriarchal, and exploitative systems. These systems, like another pandemic, reshape our understanding of development in ways that are harmful. VS, in turn, offers a vital platform for these movements to connect, share their stories, and forge a reality that prioritizes people and building relationships.

VS, amidst these challenges, focuses on reclaiming traditional knowledge and addressing the plight of Dalit women, the landless laborers facing extreme exploitation and sexism in India. These women, who come from around seventy villages, have united to reclaim their land, traditional knowledge, and diversity, asserting their agency as farmers. Their collective efforts extend to Southeast Asia, promoting diversity, fostering women's leadership, and challenging existing caste-based norms.

Vasudha reflected on the transformative beauty of these initiatives. This became particularly evident during the pandemic, which highlighted the urgent need to explore diverse solutions. Despite economic crises and draconian lockdowns, Dalit women, supported by VS, managed to produce enough food to sustain entire communities. This compelling response to the challenges of COVID-19 underscored the significance of acknowledging and working towards alternative solutions.

In conclusion, Vasudha argued that networking emerges as a vital strategy to strengthen efforts and foster solidarity. VS actively reaches out to global networks, recognizing and absorbing valuable insights to enhance its communication processes. The collaborative nature of people-to-people exchange, exemplified by the multifaceted efforts of Vikalp Sangam, demonstrates the power of collective action and a shared vision.

## Planning Session

After Vasudha spoke, Lini took over and guided the groups toward consolidating and sustaining the local practices shared. She proposed a collaborative brainstorming session to explore initiatives for research and documentation, linking and facilitating, and popularizing and mainstreaming these practices. This session aimed to leverage the collective wisdom of the participants and build upon past experiences in P2P.

1. What are initiatives that have already been undertaken by your grassroots organizations concerning research and documentation, linking and facilitating, and popularizing and mainstreaming alternative practices?

A representative from the migrant sector highlighted that even before the pandemic, migrants had a history of mutual support. CSOs and NGOs played a crucial role in facilitating this assistance. The pandemic acted as a catalyst, revealing the unique and often hidden ways migrants had supported each other, despite their distrust of governments and institutions. CSOs and NGOs demonstrated the transformative power of treating migrants as partners, not just recipients of aid, thereby fostering a strong sense of solidarity among them.

Echoing this sentiment, Lini shared a powerful example. A network of migrants intervened to prevent the deportation of a persecuted transgender individual from Thailand back to Malaysia. This anecdote exemplified how migrants work together to find safe havens and relocate across borders, building collective empowerment in the process.

Additionally, Mon emphasized the critical role of solidarity and transcending borders. The collective action of protecting transgender individuals showcased the empowering nature of such solidarity, drawing strength from shared experiences and struggles.

Another participant described their experience with a citizen-driven platform that empowers communities. They stressed the need to value lessons learned, promote grassroots practices, and facilitate knowledge sharing across communities. More than seeking government assistance, the said participant also emphasized the importance of individual accountability and promoting grassroots solutions in local initiatives.

The discussion concluded with the recognition of the crucial role of global networks in highlighting and amplifying the incredible work of grassroots initiatives.

2. How can we scale up the local alternative practices and praxis to the regional and national levels? Are we willing to host People-to-People (P2P) exchanges? Can we scale it up?

Clarifying the question surrounding the upcoming P2P exchange, Lini emphasized the need for global networks to recognize and amplify the impactful work of grassroots initiatives. She suggested exploring the possibility of scaling up these efforts through the P2P exchange. Mon then provided details about the upcoming exchange scheduled for 22 November 2022, the first onsite meeting since 2019. However, this event was postponed and was only conducted on 11 January 2023.

Recognizing that Southeast Asian CSOs must work outside the ASEAN framework, the session discussed the need for a radical restructuring of CSO engagement with Southeast Asian states. This includes charting new modes of integration for Southeast Asian peoples. It is within this context that the Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia (MASSA), a convergence of peoples and grassroots organizations, emerged.

MASSA aims to forge an alternative regional model of integration that challenges the ASEAN paradigm. This “alternative regionalism” is based on “alternatives,” which represent the nonmainstream development practices and resistance movements already undertaken by Southeast Asian communities. These initiatives are guided by principles such as cooperation, solidarity, mutual benefit, the commons, and joint development.

The 2nd People-to-People Exchange, in a hybrid format, was organized on 11 January 2023 by MASSA and Vikalp Sangam (VS), in partnership with the Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA) and 11.11.11 Coalition of the Flemish North South Movement. The exchange focused on themes that includes cross-border solidarity, social solidarity economy, environmentalism and nature, reclaiming the commons, and gender justice as a pathway to social justice.

Currently, MASSA comprises twenty-three civil society partners and networks from across Southeast Asia and neighboring regions. Additionally, a fourteen-member Steering Committee guides the organization's activities. The fourteen Steering Committee Members of MASSA are as follows:

- UP CIDS AltDev, currently acting as the secretariat;
- ASEAN SOGIE Caucus or ASC (Regional);
- Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress or AMPP (Regional);
- Asian Solidarity Economy Council or ASEC (Regional);
- CIVICA Research (Malaysia);
- Focus on the Global South (Regional);
- Fundasaun Hafoun Timor Loro'sae (Timor-Leste);
- Homenet Southeast Asia (Regional);
- Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute (Timor-Leste);
- Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia or KPRI (Indonesia);
- Milk Tea Alliance (Regional);
- Serikat Petani Pasundan or SPP (Indonesia);
- Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning or SPELL (Philippines); and
- Vietnam Peace and Development Foundation (Vietnam).

Mon explained further that MASSA's priorities moving forward would revolve around the following undertakings:

- Expanding the database of alternatives by continuing the documentation of alternative practices across the region and beyond it;
- Strengthening the movement through knowledge-sharing initiatives, network-building activities, and regional solidarity actions; and
- Maintaining engagement with regional and global networks and spaces that can bolster the discourse and support for alternatives and alternative regionalism.

During the session, Ryan Martinez and Arvin Dimalanta of UP CIDS AltDev collected information from participants who expressed interest in joining the P2P exchange. Sastro proposed simplifying the concept of P2P exchange as the first assignment for the participants. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the second question remained unaddressed.

The convergence concluded with an uplifting scene. Both online and on-site participants joined for a group photo and chanted together, “The united people can never be defeated!” These proceedings aim to capture the key points and actions discussed during the ACSC/APF 2022, laying the groundwork for future exchanges and collaborative efforts to advance grassroots alternatives and regional solidarity.



■ Figure 4. ACSC/APF 2022 participants in a group photo to conclude the two-day workshop. Source: UP CIDS AltDev





# Resolution of ACSC/APF 2022

More than five decades since its establishment, ASEAN faces criticism for favoring the interests of elites, political oligarchies, and corporate entities, thereby exacerbating social inequalities in the region. These challenges became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, exposing ASEAN's inadequate and symbolic responses that have disproportionately marginalized vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, grassroots communities demonstrated resilience within the convergence space on alternative regionalism.

In Southeast Asia, alternative regionalism advocates for human rights, secure working conditions, social protection, land rights, healthcare accessibility, and other essential factors. This approach, grounded in cross-border solidarity, has resulted in the initiation and acceptance of progressive policies, signaling a shift towards international relations shaped by nonstate actors.

To fortify alternative regionalism, it is imperative to establish networks at local, national, regional, and global levels, founded on shared principles and diverse engagement platforms. Connecting with analogous initiatives that champion solidarity and alternative development practices is essential. Recommendations stemming from the four workshops were adopted as guides to improve and expand the practice of alternative regionalism.

The participants resolved the following:

## Workshop 1

- Grassroots organizations, CSOs, and NGOs must prioritize and reinforce peoples' alternative regionalism instead of adhering to the elite and state-led model of integration advocated by ASEAN. They must channel peoples' responses and initiatives to directly address militarization, rising authoritarianism, pandemic neoliberalism, and patriarchy within the region.
- Governments must establish enhanced national and regional governance frameworks for all migrant workers in Southeast Asia, ensuring workers have rights, are safe, and have access to essential services.
- Grassroots organizations, CSOs, and NGOs must collaborate to advocate against gender discriminatory laws, actively promote gender diverse equality, and transcend gender binaries across the Southeast Asian region.

## Workshop 2

- The international community must deny any legitimacy of the Burmese military junta. Any humanitarian response must account for the initiative of the grassroots, particularly the indigenous peoples who are at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement. Political reforms should be a priority with the inclusion of CSOs.
- Labor laws in Cambodia must guarantee workers' rights, especially the right to form unions and the right to strike. GBV in certain industries such as the hospitality industry must be addressed. The criminalization of leaders of workers' rights must be withdrawn immediately. There must be sharing of lessons learned among ASEAN stakeholders, building capacities of organizations, and developing guidelines, responsive measures, and strategies needed to address GBV.

## Workshop 3

- Cross-border solidarity and regional integration in Southeast Asia must be strengthened by providing spaces where the best practices of marginalized groups and grassroots organizations can be improved and harnessed. Additionally, in building strong peoples' solidarity movements, common cross-border issues and certain mechanisms for support (e.g., funding) must be identified, and, at the same time, different forms of intersectionality across borders must be institutionalized.
- ASEAN should review and amend the ASEAN article on noninterference, and recognize the legitimacy of the NGOs and CSOs who are the practitioners of this kind of solidarity building.

## Workshop 4

- Continue conducting P2P exchanges among alternative practitioners in Southeast Asia. Extend this initiative in partnership with other regions as an expression of continuing dialogue even beyond ACSC/APF.

Finally, participants pledged to share their knowledge and insights by building on the momentum from ACSC/APF 2022 and delving deeper into the topic of People-to-People Exchange at the MASSA Regional Conference.

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