



PROCEEDINGS 2026-42

Program on Alternative Development

Sustainable Development Studies in Southeast Asia (SUDSSEA) Winter School Proceedings

02-07 December 2024

**University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development
Studies**



**UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
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"Facing land insecurity and coastal reclamation, Manila Bay fisherfolk organize to protect their shores and livelihoods."

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Table of Contents

About the Proceedings	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
<i>Transparency Statement</i>	xii
 Day 1	
Opening Ceremonies	1
Welcoming Remarks	1
<i>Ma. Simeona M. Martinez</i>	
Introduction to Alternative Development (AltDev) Lectures	1
<i>Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem</i>	
Logistical Announcements	2
<i>Dr. Gabriel Facal</i>	
Morning Session Lectures	3
<i>Situationer: Post-Pandemic Southeast Asia – Systemic Perils and Peoples’ Alternatives</i>	3
<i>Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem</i>	
Afternoon Session Lectures	6
<i>Critical, Cultural, and Mass Orientation in Community Research in the Philippines</i>	6
<i>Asst. Prof. Jose Monfred Sy</i>	
<i>Spatial narratives from below: Opensource GIS, Remote Sensing and counter-mapping as community engagement</i>	9
<i>Asst. Prof. Ma. Simeona M. Martinez</i>	
Fieldwork Orientation	12
 Day 2	
Fieldwork in Barangay Tatalon and Manila Bay	13
Field Immersion Reflections	14
<i>Community Leadership and Resilience: The Experience of Tatalon Nanay Power</i>	14
<i>Environmental Inequality and Coastal Livelihoods: Reflections from Manila Bay</i>	16
Grassroots Movements and Participatory Alternative Development	18
Conclusion	18

Day 3

Field Immersion with PISTON, PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines, and KruNaLi Farmers

	19
Field Immersion Reflections	20
<i>Labor Struggles and Urban Mobility: The Case of PISTON</i>	20
<i>Informal Labor and Women's Economic Agency: PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines</i>	21
<i>Urban Agriculture and Community Sustainability: KruNaLi Farmers</i>	23
Reflections on Grassroots Development and Community Agency	24
Conclusion	24

Day 4

Lectures

	25
Morning Session Lectures	25
<i>Understanding Communities and Mining in the Philippines</i>	25
<i>Beverly Besmanos</i>	
<i>Exploring Past Practices in Palawan to Build a Sustainable Future</i>	28
<i>Prof. Hermine Xbauflair</i>	
Afternoon Session Lectures	29
<i>The Significance and Limits of Adat (Customary) Territory Recognition in Addressing State Territorialization and Rural Agrarian Crises: Insights from Kasepuhan Sukawana, Banten, Indonesia</i>	29
<i>Mohamad Shohibuddin</i>	
<i>Engaged Research on Urban Poor</i>	31
<i>Assist. Prof. Noreen Sapalo and Dr. Mary Racelis</i>	

Day 5

Solidarity Night

	33
Solidarity and Celebration: The SUDSSEA 2024 Solidarity Night	33

Day 6

Closing Program

	37
Fellows' Research Proposal Presentations and Closing Program	37
Group Final Presentations	41
Linking Theory and Practice in the Field	42
Grassroots Organizing and Community Resilience	43
Political Economy of Urban Livelihoods	43
Critiques of Development and Capitalist Exploitation	44

Community Solidarity and Alternative Development Paradigms	45
Feedback on the Fieldwork Component	45
Concluding Reflections	46
References	46

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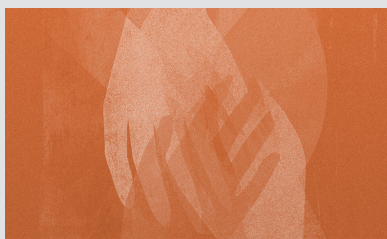
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6th MASSA Conference:
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Forging a People's Alternative Regionalism

Preliminary discussion on the history of the
regional solidarity movement in Southeast Asia



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PROCEEDINGS

Forging a People's Alternative
Regionalism: Preliminary
discussion on the history
of the regional solidarity
movement in Southeast Asia

About the Proceedings

These are the proceedings of the Institut de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine (Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia or IRASEC) Doctoral Winter School in Social Sciences and Humanities 2024 held at the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies located at the Ang Bahay ng Alumni in UP Diliman, Quezon City on December 2 to 7, 2024. Designed to foster comparative and regional research methodologies in Southeast Asia and to promote co-supervision of doctoral dissertations for early-career researchers, the Winter School facilitated the participation of eight seasoned academics from the Philippines and Malaysia and 20 scholars from Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, India, and the Netherlands in an intensive six-day program focusing on diverse topics under the overarching theme, “Sustainable Development Studies in Southeast Asia” or SUDSSEA. The first week (November 25–30, 2024) of classes and field trips took place at Thammasat University in Thailand. The students, a lecturer (Boonlert Visetpricha, Thammasat University), and the organizer (Gabriel Facal, IRASEC) then traveled to the University of the Philippines Diliman.

The Winter School aimed to examine growth and its intricate interconnection with development, exploring how these dynamics intersect with inequality, urban expansion, socio-environmental systems, and sustainability. SUDSSEA's scientific rationale emphasized that, in the last decades, Southeast Asia has undergone development transformations which were fast and massive, impacting the sustainability of societies and environments. Since the 1960s, the spectacular economic and demographic growth has led to considerable upheavals in the organization of human communities. This phenomenon is marked by inequality of growth within and among countries, urban expansion and the construction of major connectivity infrastructures, pressure on natural resources and its social impact, as well as the challenge to assure food security in altered environments.

To address these questions, Bangkok, Manila and their surroundings are of comparative interest because of their contrasting development experiences, the diversity of their populations, the intensity of the flows with surrounding semi-urban and rural areas, and the variety of environmental challenges they face. During SUDSSEA, researchers and practitioners from various fields and disciplines of SSH intended to shed light from different angles on the challenges posed by the unequal and short-term nature of growth, and to explore more sustainable development initiatives. The school addressed questions such as: the paradigm of “green” and inclusive growth; diverse territorial organization of human activities; relationship between human beings and their environment;

the impact of development on inequalities; exposure to risks; environmental degradation, public policy and political ecology; and resilience and strategies of local populations in the face of environmental challenges.

These questions were studied thanks to cases all across Southeast Asia, through a comparative perspective. A number of key questions were addressed, including:

- Inequality and growth: regionally, income inequalities remain high and generally increase. Moreover, Asia's economic and demographic growth has disrupted "traditional" social organization. In this context, what is the relevance of growth as an indicator of development?
- Urban expansion and persistence of rural landscapes: the size of cities in Asia has reached unprecedented proportions, often rendering living conditions difficult. The impact both coastal and rural areas. How do the public and the authorities react to these pressures?
- Pressure on natural resources and its social impact: energy transition and decarbonization plans are based on the extraction of new critical raw materials. More generally, developed countries link their strategies for reducing environmental impact on the land, the water and the air to the outsourcing of their pollution. How are these new impacts being publicized and mitigated?
- Socio-environmental tension: is it possible to preserve ecosystems—and not just for a few emblematic species or places—without penalizing local populations? How do scales complexify this question, when local livelihoods do not match with transboundary sustainability of resources (e.g. oceans and air)?

The series of activities comprising the Winter School program were categorized as follows:

- Lectures and knowledge exchange. Academics from diverse disciplines discussed the methodological approaches and theoretical lens of their research including relevant literature on their chosen topic, highlighting their experiences, significant findings, and the insights they gained from practice.
- Fieldwork activities. Exposure visits were designed in collaboration with the Winter School academic partner, the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies Program on Alternative Development (UP CIDS AltDev) and its multi-sectoral partners: Tatalon

Nanay Power (an initiative by women and mothers in a disaster-prone area in Quezon City that facilitate assistance to indigent households), PANGISDA-Pilipinas (a nationwide alliance of small-scale fisherfolk in the Philippines), PISTON (a nationwide coalition of public transport groups), PATAMABA (a national network of homebased and other informal economy workers), and the KruNaLi Farmers (a community-based organization focused on urban farming and food security located in Quezon City). The Winter School scholars interacted with the very communities at the heart of their advocacies, gaining firsthand insight into both their daily environments and the complex, evolving developmental challenges that they face.

- Workshops and proposal development exercises. Scholars of the Winter School were tasked to reflect on and reevaluate their research proposals taking inspiration from the discussions and activities facilitated by the trainers and the reading materials and resources curated for the program, as well as the students' experiences interacting with communities in the fieldwork sites.
- The program culminates with the Winter School scholars presenting their research proposals, noting how their ideas had evolved through the insights and lessons gained through their engagement with the trainers, their peers, and the organizations they visited during their short fieldwork.

These proceedings were prepared by Adzlina Ganang Aminnajar and Yasmin Mangotara¹, and edited by Dr. Eduardo Tadem, Ma. Simeona Martinez, Rafael Vicente Dimalanta, Sheila Mae Pagurayan, Eunice Santiago (UP CIDS AltDev) and Dr. Gabriel Facal (IRASEC). It is jointly co-published by the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies and the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC).

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Transparency Statement

The writers declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized during the preparation of these proceedings under strict limitations. TurboScribe was used solely to generate the initial text transcriptions from the original audio recordings of the lectures and workshops, while Grammarly was employed to improve sentence construction, address grammatical errors, and enhance overall readability. Moreover, ChatGPT was used for another round of technical enhancements, including sequence of ideas and thought structures. The authors have reviewed, verified, and when necessary, revised all AI-assisted inputs in this work.

DAY 1

Opening Ceremonies

December 2, 2024

Welcoming Remarks

Ma. Simeona M. Martinez

*Co-convenor, Program on Alternative Development
Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, UP Diliman*

The program for the Philippine segment of the Winter School was formally opened by Asst. Prof. Ma. Simeona Martinez, Co-Convenor of the Program on Alternative Development (AltDev) of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS). She welcomed the participants warmly and contextualized the significance of holding the second part of the Winter School in Manila.

Introduction to Alternative Development (AltDev) Lectures

Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem

*Convenor, Program on Alternative Development
Professor Emeritus, Asian Studies Center, UP Diliman*

An introduction of the AltDev Lectures was then initiated by Dr. Eduardo C. Tandem, Convenor of the UP CIDS AltDev. He introduced UP CIDS as the University's policy think tank. Unlike conventional research centers that often prioritize the demands of governments or private interests, Dr. Tadem emphasized that CIDS has long committed itself to critical and inclusive forms of inquiry. Specifically, the Program on Alternative Development – founded by Dr. Tandem – amplifies the perspectives of marginalized groups that are often left out of policy conversations.

Dr. Tadem outlined the 17 programs that make up UP CIDS, spanning education reform, political economy, biodiversity conservation, urban studies, social movements, among others. These programs are organized into four clusters: (1) Education and Capacity; (2) Development; (3) Social, Political, and Cultural; and (4) Local Regional Studies Network, alongside newly-integrated

programs. Within this institutional structure, he highlighted the Program on Alternative Development as unique in its focus on documenting and theorizing grassroots alternatives to mainstream development models. These alternatives, he stressed, are not minor footnotes to conventional development, but rather concrete practices of survival, creativity, and justice that deserve scholarly and political recognition. Since 2018, AltDev has published over sixty case studies ranging from cooperative farming and home-based workers' networks to indigenous ecological management compiled into volumes now publicly accessible online.

He also recounted how AltDev has convened regional conferences on alternatives, culminating in the creation of the Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia (MASSA), a network of forty-eight civil society organizations. MASSA, he argued, represents the seeds of a peoples' regionalism, distinct from ASEAN's elite-centered integration, grounded instead in grassroots solidarity across borders.

Beyond being a continuation of the Winter School discussions from the Bangkok segment of the program, Dr. Tadem's opening remarks framed the Philippine leg as an invitation to consider how Filipino experiences and struggles resonate within the broader regional search for sustainable and people-centered development pathways.

Logistical Announcements

Dr. Gabriel Facal

Deputy Director, IRASEC

Following the opening address, Dr. Gabriel Facal of IRASEC took the floor to provide a logistical orientation for the week. The session ensured that participants were not only aware of the intellectual objectives of the Winter School but also fully informed about the daily schedule that would structure their stay in Manila.

Dr. Facal walked participants through the program of activities: the mix of lectures at the University of the Philippines Diliman Campus, fieldwork immersions in Metro Manila communities, and group report-writing workshops that would culminate in presentations. He highlighted the principle that the Winter School sought to embody: lectures and immersion were not separate but complementary, with each deepening the other.

He then turned to matters of protocol. Participants were reminded to be mindful of time, to respect the schedules of community partners, and to observe guidelines of conduct during fieldwork. He stressed that the communities to be visited—women leaders in Barangay Tatalon, fisherfolk organizations in Manila Bay [an area located in Cavite], jeepney drivers' federations, home-based workers' networks, and urban farmers in Barangay Krus na Ligas—were not “research subjects” but partners and teachers in the learning process. Respect, sensitivity, and humility were therefore expected of all Winter School fellows.

His orientation also covered practical concerns such as transportation arrangements, safety protocols, and meal provisions. He emphasized that any documentation during fieldwork must be done with the consent of community members, underscoring the ethical obligations of the program. The tone of the session was at once procedural and reflective, preparing participants for the week's activities while reminding them of their deeper responsibilities as learners engaging with communities.

Morning Session Lectures

Situationer: Post-Pandemic Southeast Asia – Systemic Perils and Peoples' Alternatives

Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem

Convenor, Program on Alternative Development, UP CIDS

Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem opened the Philippine leg's lecture series with a sweeping and incisive account of the crises that have engulfed Southeast Asia in the wake of COVID-19. His lecture, titled “Post-Pandemic Southeast Asia: Systemic Perils and Peoples' Alternatives,” was at once statistical, analytical, and deeply political, echoing the urgency of the moment and the collective responsibility of scholars and movements in the region.

He began with the stark human cost of the pandemic: as of mid-2023, Southeast Asia had registered over 35.9 million cases and 367,000 deaths. Yet, he emphasized, the crisis was not only a health catastrophe but also a multidimensional shock to economies, societies, and politics. Factories shuttered, tourism collapsed, migrant workers were displaced, and millions in the informal economy saw their livelihoods vanish. Women, already

overburdened with unpaid care work, were among the hardest hit. “COVID-19 did not create poverty,” he reminded participants, “but it exposed and deepened the precarity that has long defined the lives of the majority.”

Turning to the regional political response, Dr. Tadem was unsparing in his critique of ASEAN. While leaders held numerous summits and issued several statements, meaningful collective action was delayed and fragmented. Vaccine procurement was pursued nationally rather than regionally, undermining solidarity at the very moment it was most needed. Even ASEAN’s COVID-19 Response Fund, agreed upon only in June 2021, remained opaque, with no public accounting of how funds were allocated or used. This revealed ASEAN as “a highly publicized but hollow edifice”—a structure that privileges state elites over the needs of the peoples.

The lecture then shifted to the economic perils of the post-pandemic landscape. Growth rates, he noted, briefly rebounded in 2022 but quickly stagnated amid inflation, energy shocks, and global geopolitical tensions. Meanwhile, debt levels across the region threatened to spiral into a trap, with collective debt repayment obligations of nearly half a trillion US dollars over the next four years. Informal workers—who make up roughly 70 percent of Southeast Asia’s labor force—remained excluded from basic protections, a precariat whose existence is vital to economies but ignored by policy.

Dr. Tadem further underscored the region’s democratic deficit, weaving together data with recent events. From Myanmar’s violent junta, to Indonesia’s controversial new criminal code, to the return of the Marcos dynasty in the Philippines, he painted a sobering picture of shrinking civic space and rising authoritarianism. Elections may continue, he said, but democracy in substantive terms was being hollowed out.

He then broadened the analysis to social and ecological vulnerabilities. Health systems, already fragile, buckled under the weight of the pandemic, exacerbated by the outmigration of nurses and doctors to wealthier economies. Inequality soared, with wealth increasingly concentrated among elites while millions struggled to survive. The region’s progress toward the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals has also fallen short, missing its targets in all but one area. While it remains on track to meet Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), a closer look reveals that Southeast Asian states have largely prioritized corporate interests at the expense of their citizens. Corruption persists across the region, with Transparency International ranking most

ASEAN states in the lower half of global governance indicators. Overlaying all this was the climate crisis: stronger typhoons, floods, and rising sea levels devastating poor communities while governments doubled down on extractive, fossil fuel-based growth strategies.

But the lecture was not only a litany of perils. In its final sections, Dr. Tadem shifted tone, highlighting peoples' alternatives emerging from below. Drawing on AltDev's documentation, he showcased inspiring examples: the community pantries and pharmacies that proliferated in the Philippines during lockdowns; indigenous women's weaving collectives sustaining both culture and livelihood; fisherfolk across maritime boundaries once practicing a commons-based ethic of coexistence; and cross-border cultural initiatives such as Indonesia's *Koalisi Seni* and the Philippines' *Kontra-GaPi* Ensemble, which treat art as resistance. These initiatives, though fragmented, represent what he called "a regionalism from below"—an alternative to ASEAN's elite-centered integration, grounded instead in solidarity across peoples and communities.

In closing, he proposed that the crises of Southeast Asia cannot be solved by "returning to normal." Rather, they demand to rethink the concept of development itself. Grassroots practices, social solidarity, feminist economies, indigenous stewardship, and progressive taxation (such as proposals for a wealth tax) all point toward a more just and sustainable future. His final words were both a diagnosis and a challenge: "Our futures will not be determined by governments alone. They will be shaped by the movements and communities who are already building alternatives."

Open Forum

The first question came from a participant from Vietnam, who asked whether ASEAN, despite its elite orientation, might still be reformed into a more responsive institution. Dr. Tadem noted that ASEAN is unlikely to transform structurally, given its consensus-based decision-making and the dominance of state interests. At best, he suggested, it may continue to serve as a diplomatic platform. Real people-centered integration, however, would have to come from below, through transnational networks like MASSA.

An Indonesian participant then raised the question of authoritarian populism, noting how leaders across the region had exploited the pandemic to consolidate power. Dr. Tadem responded by tracing the roots of populism to systemic inequality and the failures of liberal democracy. Populist leaders thrive in crises by offering simple solutions to complex problems, but these solutions usually

reinforce elite power. In contrast, grassroots movements, while slower and less visible, remain the most enduring counterweight.

A participant from the Philippines posed a question about the South China Sea dispute, particularly the intensifying conflict between China, the Philippines, and the United States. Dr. Tadem cautioned against “sovereignty chauvinism,” which, he argued, reduces the sea to a battlefield of states while ignoring the lived realities of fisherfolk. He proposed the framework of the commons, suggesting that the South China Sea should be treated as shared heritage, managed cooperatively by fisherfolk across borders. He pointed out that, historically, such cross-border sharing had been the norm before geopolitical tensions militarized the waters.

The final question of the morning came from a Thai participant, who asked about the role of scholars in contexts where activism and research often collide. Dr. Tadem replied with conviction that scholars could not afford the luxury of neutrality in times of crisis. He called for scholar-activism, a practice of engaged research that stands with communities rather than above them. “Research,” he said, “is not just to describe the world—it is to help change it.”

The forum ended on an energized note. The questions revealed not only the shared crises facing Southeast Asia, but also the shared aspirations of its scholars and communities. Participants left the session with a sharpened sense of urgency and solidarity, prepared to carry the morning’s themes into the rest of the Winter School.

Afternoon Session Lectures

Critical, Cultural, and Mass Orientation in Community Research in the Philippines

Asst. Prof. Jose Monfred Sy

Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature, UP Diliman

Asst. Prof. Jose Monfred Sy, a member of the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature at the University of the Philippines Diliman and Project Leader of the UP CIDS Program on Alternative Development, delivered one of the most theoretically rich and practically grounded lectures of the Winter School. His session, which drew heavily from his research and experience in

decolonial and community-based research, emphasized how academic inquiry in the Philippines and Southeast Asia must be anchored in anti-oppressive commitments and relational orientations that challenge hegemonic paradigms.

At the outset, Asst. Prof. Sy situated his talk by asking a deceptively simple yet provocative question: how do we describe the dominant ways of thinking about and doing research? He argued that prevailing traditions in social science remain deeply shaped by Eurocentrism and Anglocentrism, often marginalizing other epistemologies and reproducing asymmetrical relations between researchers and communities. Research, he stressed, too often becomes dislocated, disembodied, and disengaged from the very lives it seeks to represent. Such approaches not only render communities as “subjects” of study but also reinforce hierarchical and patriarchal relations within the academe itself.

Building from this critique, he turned to the notion of coloniality as theorized by Maldonado-Torres and others: a long-standing pattern of power that persists well beyond formal colonial administrations and continues to define labor, culture, and knowledge production. Asst. Prof. Sy contrasted this with postcoloniality, which he argued sometimes obscures the persistence of imperial structures. For him, decoloniality must always be understood as anti-imperialism—a project that not only recalls colonial legacies, but confronts present-day imperial entanglements. He pointed to Philippine cases where state elites and foreign corporations continue to broker land and resources for capital accumulation, demonstrating how Empire operates in new guises.

In this light, Asst. Prof. Sy introduced the idea of the pluriverse, inspired by the Zapatistas’ call for “a world where many worlds fit.” A pluriversal orientation, he explained, allows diverse epistemologies and temporalities to coexist without hierarchy. Unlike universalist frameworks of development or degrowth, the pluriverse does not impose singular metrics of progress but insists on dignity, coexistence, and relationality across communities. He highlighted three dimensions of this orientation—spatiality, temporality, and diversity—underscoring that a decolonial imagination must leave behind narrow anthropocentric ideas of progress and instead recognize the multiple life-worlds communities have already been cultivating.

Crucial to this project is what Mignolo and Walsh (2018) refer to as “decolonial insurgency”—the practice of scholar-activism that transgresses dominant structures of knowledge production and forges new political and cultural arrangements. Asst. Prof. Sy reminded participants that decolonial thinking requires doing. Research cannot remain confined to theoretical abstraction; it

must be integrated with social movements, grassroots struggles, and long-term solidarities with communities.

To translate these ideas into practice, Asst. Prof. Sy presented ten principles for anti-oppressive, decolonial, and community-based research. These included: (1) recognizing that knowledge production is socially constructed; (2) conducting and supporting research that, through processes and outcomes, challenges the status quo; (3) recognizing people as co-researchers rather than subjects; (4) allowing research questions to emerge from communities themselves; (5) engaging in inquiries of resistance to oppression/colonialism/imperialism; (6) sustaining long-term relationships of trust rather than treating engagements as disposable; (7) letting methods flow from lived realities rather than rigid academic frameworks; (8) appreciating that a shared goal underscores the importance of participation and community benefit; (9) fostering research praxis that is holistic, integrative, and ethical; (10) and adopting an activist orientation that foregrounds protection and advancement of the people.

The lecture then shifted into a highly interactive segment. Asst. Prof. Sy drew from Filipino psychology to illustrate how relational values like *loob* (relational will), *kapwa* (shared self or fellow-being), and *pakikiramdam* (relational sensitivity) could serve as methodological anchors in fieldwork. These concepts, he explained, guide practices of empathy, reciprocity, and attentiveness to subtle cues in community engagement. Participants from both the Philippines and abroad actively contributed to this discussion, with Filipino and other Southeast Asian students offering insights from their own linguistic and cultural contexts. For instance, one participant from the Maranao tradition reflected on how the absence of a direct equivalent for *loob* in their language highlighted nuances of cultural relationality and historical layers of invasion.

The richness of this exchange demonstrated how decolonial scholarship is always conversational and becoming. Rather than universalizing, it opens spaces for dialogue across cultures and communities. Asst. Prof. Sy further elaborated with concrete lessons from the field: the importance of building trust, engaging in shared meals and practices like *pasalubong* (gift-giving) and *hatid* (accompanying visitors), and respecting local rhythms of time and interaction. These were not minor cultural notes but, in his view, essential ethical practices for anyone serious about community-based research.

In the concluding part of the lecture, Asst. Prof. Sy facilitated a short workshop where participants, grouped by tables, reflected on how they might apply

these principles to their upcoming field visits. He encouraged them to think critically about the kinds of communities they would engage with—fisherfolk, peasants, or workers’ unions—and to design questions and approaches that would emerge organically from these engagements. The room was animated with discussion, underscoring how theoretical insights could immediately inform practical preparation.

Finally, Asst. Prof. Sy emphasized that researchers are not the sole producers of knowledge but often documenters, witnesses, and assistants in co-creating knowledge with communities. Decolonial scholarship, he concluded, is less about grand narratives of salvation and more about amplifying the alternatives communities are already living and imagining. The session ended with a reminder that to think decolonially is to act decolonially—a call that resonated deeply with the Winter School participants as they prepared for their field immersion the following day.

Spatial narratives from below: Opensource GIS, Remote Sensing and counter-mapping as community engagement

Asst. Prof. Ma. Simeona M. Martinez

*Co-convenor, Program on Alternative Development
Department of Geography, UP Diliman*

Asst. Prof. Ma. Simeona Martinez’s lecture capped the first day of the Winter School lectures, emphasizing how participatory and counter-mapping methods can benefit researchers, community members, and advocacy workers by visualizing community and grassroots narratives of place and their lived experience of it. Asst. Prof. Martinez defined maps as tools of communication that integrate time and space – that the spatial features in a map encapsulate specific moments in time that are often considered valuable information for the makers of the map. She goes on to emphasize what G. Malcolm Lewis underscores in his work, “The Origins of Cartography” (1987) about how mapping as a graphic form of communication may have been as old as the spatial consciousness of humans, which enabled our ancestors to avoid hazards and hunt successfully. She cited examples of prehistoric depictions of the environment such as the clay tablet of Babylonia and the sea faring charts of Marshall Islanders, from which it can be induced that mapping in its earliest form developed to achieve collaborative action. Later, the symbols and graphical representations became standardized, and the maps became

less pictorial and more abstract. Throughout time, maps have facilitated our evolving understanding of the world.

The second part of Asst. Prof. Martinez's presentation argued for an appreciation of maps not as value-free objects, but as powerful instruments of oppression and marginalization. She cited the experience of informal dwellers in Dharavi, India, (one of the largest informal settlements in the world), and the ways colonial maps were used to divide *terra nullius* into colonial territories without regard for indigenous systems and ways of life. Asst. Prof. Martinez invoked J. Brian Harley's argument from *Maps, Knowledge, and Power*, where he described maps as weapons of imperialism on par with ammunition and warships. It is thus undeniable that maps are imbued with power. She then cites Shiloh Krupar's description of how cartographic conventions remain bound to violent structures of power, including imperial exploration, territorialization, resource extraction, and state control. She adds that "opening up other ways of knowing", quoting Jeremy Crampton, is how critical cartography works in light of counteracting oppressive mapping practices.

Asst. Prof. Martinez then centered her talk on the critical practice of mapping, saying that it is embodied in countermapping, a word coined by Nancy Peluso when she described how the indigenous Dayak pushed back against the state to gain control of their forest resources by contesting state authority over their traditional land use practices through the production of maps that depict their ancestral lands and traditional boundaries. In this and other contexts, maps are used as cartographic tools by or for marginalized peoples. More examples were presented that were mostly lifted from the publication of Ortega, Martinez, Dayrit, and Saguin (2018), such as countermapping in art and in pedagogy. She shared the work of the multimedia Filipino artist Cian Dayrit, describing his map-like tapestries from various exhibits, as well as the sketch maps made by participants of various workshops that Dayrit organized with labor union members during pickets and protests; in other occasions his collaborators in these workshops were members of indigenous communities and peasants who experienced dispossession due to corporate-led development projects. Other notable examples include a collaboration between a Filipino scholar, cartography students of UP Diliman, and the Junior Philippine Geographical Society in 2013, which mapped the dispossession of farmers in an industrializing area of the Laguna province. Similarly, Martinez highlighted the MinaMapa project by the Ulirat Collective—an organization advocating for cartography for social justice and the marginalized sectors. Partnering with UP Diliman geography students paved the way to digitizing the mining tenement control maps of the Philippines to make them readily

useful for digital mapping. The Countermapping New Clark City project of the Countermapping PH Network was also presented, alongside the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project based in San Francisco, USA, the LGBTQ+ Safe Spaces Project of MapBeks Philippines, the SaanYanPH project that facilitated the mapping of community pantries during the COVID-19 lockdown, and the Geonarratives of Human Rights Defenders in Negros Island Project that revealed the everyday geographies of violence experienced by HRDs in the island. These countermapping projects featured the use of open data, sketch mapping, and story-telling methodologies, as well as crowdsourcing. Collaborative mapping for documenting experienced hazards, community resources, and disaster mitigation strategies was also elaborated during the lecture through the Barangay Tatalon case study of the UP CIDS AltDev and its partners, the UP Diliman Department of Geography, Ulirat Collective, Tatalon Nanay Power, and the Barangay Tatalon LGU.

Martinez however noted that despite their collaborative nature, counter-mapping and participatory methodologies often face a major hurdle: technical barriers among stakeholders and collaborators. While technical know-how may be limited at the early stages of the engagement, this can be addressed by holding workshops that will help enhance local capacities through the utilization of accessible tools such as opensource mapping software or readily available data. Limited resources are another challenge that may affect project implementation, as well as existing power dynamics in the project site. Such can be addressed by establishing long-term partnerships that allocate adequate time for collaborative planning and for mapping the trajectory of the project given the priorities of stakeholders, and ensuring continuous consultation among the parties involved.

As the session came to a close, Asst. Prof. Martinez emphasized the importance of shifting the focus of mapping from its objective, top-down, centrist and expert-oriented tendencies towards one that is multi-sensory, performative, participatory, and community-centered. Citing Ley Roberts' *"Mapping Cultures: A Spatial Anthropology"* published in 2012, she argues that instead of using maps as disciplinary apparatuses that perpetuate state, military, corporate, and technocratic interests, research engagements must cultivate mapping practices that are open, agential, and empowering to the local community.

Fieldwork Orientation

Finally, a brief orientation on the field visits for the next two days was facilitated by the UP CIDS AltDev Team. The logistical arrangements, travel and safety reminders, guide on community partners' informed consent, and designation of Winter School participants to the five fieldwork sites were discussed in detail to ensure the smooth and productive conduct of field activities.

DAY 2

Fieldwork in Barangay Tatalon and Manila Bay

December 3, 2024

On December 3, 2024, the first day of the field visits of the IRASEC Winter School on Sustainable Development Studies in Southeast Asia, participants were divided into two groups to engage with grassroots communities in Metro Manila. The field immersion formed a central component of the Winter School's objective of linking theoretical discussions on sustainable development with the lived realities of communities confronting social and environmental challenges.

One group visited Tatalon Nanay Power in Barangay Tatalon, Quezon City, while another group engaged with PANGISDA Pilipinas and fishing communities along Manila Bay, particularly in the coastal areas of Ligton (in Rosario) and Noveleta in Cavite. The program included courtesy calls with local leaders, community conversations (*kumustahan*), and guided walks through flood-prone urban settlements and coastal areas affected by pollution and environmental degradation. These visits provided participants with an opportunity to observe firsthand how communities organize themselves in response to development pressures, environmental risks, and socioeconomic inequalities.

Field immersion activities such as these reflect the principles of participatory development, which emphasize the importance of engaging directly with communities in order to understand development challenges from the perspectives of those most affected by them. Rather than treating communities as passive recipients of policy interventions, participatory approaches recognize them as active agents who possess valuable knowledge and lived experiences that shape development outcomes.

Field Immersion Reflections

Community Leadership and Resilience: The Experience of Tatalon Nanay Power

Fieldwork host
Tatalon Nanay Power

Site
Kaliraya Circle, Barangay Tatalon, Quezon City

Researchers assigned
Rafael Vicente Dimalanta and Junah Amor C. Delfinado

Students
Kangkana Shivam, Abigail Roa, Lora Batino, Massamon Ketngoen, Seila Chea, Supasit Kamkoon, Adzlina Aminnajar, Mai Phuc Thinh

Program

- Courtesy call with Barangay Secretary (representative of the Punong Barangay)
- *Kumustahan*, Conversations with Tatalon Nanay Power
- Community walk to flood and fire-prone areas

The visit to Tatalon Nanay Power, a women-led grassroots organization in Barangay Tatalon, highlighted the role of community leadership in responding to everyday vulnerabilities such as flooding, overcrowding, and gaps in public health. Participants engaged in conversations with community members and walked through flood- and fire-prone areas of the barangay. These interactions revealed the multiple challenges faced by urban poor communities while also demonstrating how local organizing and solidarity help sustain community life.

Reflecting on the experience, Massamon Ketngoen (Thailand) noted how the encounter transformed her understanding of sustainable development in the region:

“Working with the Tatalon Nanay Power group transformed my perspective on sustainable development in Southeast Asia. It’s the people at the center—those facing hardships every single day—who truly understand what resilience means.”

Despite the difficult living conditions, the mothers of the community have become important leaders and organizers, supporting one another and mobilizing collective responses to crises. Ms. Ketngoen further observed that the women of the community demonstrate remarkable strength and solidarity:

"The Tatalon community deals with overcrowding, flooding, and illness on a constant basis. Yet the mothers in the Tatalon Nanay Power group lead with quiet strength, organizing and holding their community together through every crisis."

These observations echo broader discussions in development studies about community resilience, where local networks of cooperation and mutual aid enable communities to navigate environmental and socioeconomic challenges.



Photo 1. Winter School participants conduct a community walk with fieldwork hosts in a flood-prone neighborhood in Quezon City.
Photo by Seila Chea

For Mai Phuc Thinh of Vietnam, the visit to Tatalon Nanay Power echoed the themes of resilience and community transformation that underpin his own academic interests. Observing how the women organized themselves to address food insecurity, flooding, and other recurring urban challenges reinforced his view that sustainable development is rooted in strong community networks and cultural identity. Reflecting on the experience, he noted that "research must focus on the voices and experiences of those directly affected," emphasizing that meaningful scholarship begins by listening to communities themselves. The visit demonstrated how local initiatives grounded in solidarity and mutual support enable marginalized communities not only to adapt to adversity but also to become active agents of social change.

For Adzlina Aminnajar (Philippines), who joined the Tatalon Nanay Power visit, the encounter resonated deeply with her previous work in human rights and development. Drawing from her experience as a former human rights development worker, the conversations with the women of the community provided a powerful reminder of the lived realities behind development discourse. During the *kumustahan* and community conversations, the mothers openly shared their experiences of recurring floods, the constant risk of fires in densely built settlements, and the everyday struggle to sustain their families amid economic constraints. Rather than framing their narratives solely around hardship, however, the women emphasized collective action and solidarity within the community.

For Ms. Aminnajar, these stories illustrated how grassroots leadership emerges organically in communities facing structural inequalities. Walking through the narrow pathways of the settlement further reinforced this realization: homes are closely built together, infrastructure remains limited, and environmental vulnerabilities are visible in everyday life. Yet these conditions have also fostered strong community ties. The women of Tatalon Nanay Power organize trainings, support one another during emergencies, and maintain networks of care that ensure no family is left behind. Their efforts demonstrate that community members themselves are often the primary agents of resilience and change.

From a broader perspective, these experiences resonate with the concept of the “right to the city,” which argues that urban residents—particularly marginalized communities—should have a central role in shaping the spaces they inhabit and the policies that affect their lives. The organizing efforts of Tatalon Nanay Power reflect how communities assert their presence and agency within rapidly urbanizing environments. Reflecting on the visit, Ms. Aminnajar noted that encounters such as these reaffirm the importance of community-centered approaches in human rights and development work. The women of Tatalon Nanay Power are not merely beneficiaries of development initiatives; they are also leaders and organizers who actively shape the future of their community through collective action.

*Environmental Inequality and Coastal Livelihoods:
Reflections from Manila Bay*

Fieldwork host PANGISDA Pilipinas Site Manila Bay (Rosario and Noveleta, Cavite) Researchers assigned Eunice B. Santiago and Ryan Joseph C. Martinez Students Giang Do Thi Huong, Itthinopwaree Kaewsansuk, Nuttawat Unjitlerd, Muhammad Ahalla Tsauro, Nakhem Eom. Yasmin Mangotara, Floris Benjamin, Rajashri Deka, Floper Gershwin Manuel, Jury Met, Phan Thi Kim Tam, Tran Thi Anh Nguyet Program ■ Orientation from PANGISDA Pilipinas (led by Pablo Rosales) ■ Community walk in Ligdong and Noveleta Areas ■ Interview with community leaders and community assessment

The second group visited PANGISDA Pilipinas, a national alliance of small-scale fisherfolk advocating for the protection of coastal livelihoods and marine ecosystems. Participants conducted a community walk through fishing areas along Manila Bay, where they observed the environmental consequences of pollution, urban expansion, and coastal reclamation projects.

For Nguyet Thi Anh Tran (Cambodia), the visit revealed the stark realities of environmental degradation and poverty affecting coastal communities. She described the initial impressions upon arriving in the area:

“The first impressions are of mud, plastic waste, rickety wooden planks, and the watchful eyes of residents and children.”

These observations revealed the deep interconnection between environmental degradation and social inequality. Settlements line polluted shorelines, while families rely on fishing, recycling, and other forms of informal labor to sustain their livelihoods. Nguyet further reflected on the broader implications of these conditions for children growing up in the community:

“Behind this scenery lies the story of thousands of children growing up under harsh living conditions, where pollution is not only an environmental issue but also a crisis for future generations.”

At the same time, moments of humanity and resilience were visible within the community. As Nguyet observed:

“Two small dresses swaying in the wind above a layer of sludge suggested that beauty and innocence still persist amid landscapes devastated by pollution and poverty.”

These reflections highlight how environmental degradation is not merely a technical issue but a deeply human one, affecting families and communities who rely on coastal ecosystems for their livelihoods.



Photo 2. Winter School scholars share a light moment with village residents during their fieldwork in a community along Manila Bay.

Photo by Muhammad Ahalla Tsauro

Grassroots Movements and Participatory Alternative Development

Across both field sites, participants encountered grassroots leaders who actively challenge development policies that threaten community livelihoods and environmental sustainability. Reflecting on the similarities between struggles in different Southeast Asian contexts, Itthinopwaree Kaewsansuk (Thailand) compared the Manila Bay fishing communities with communities facing displacement in Bangkok:

“At first glance, outsiders might think the two communities face different issues. However, I believe that they both desire the same basic things: a safe home and a job that supports them, their families, and their communities to live with human dignity.”

Kaewsansuk also emphasized the important role that academic institutions can play in supporting grassroots movements and amplifying community voices:

“Universities therefore not only produce knowledge alongside the people and government but also build social relationships that contribute to sustainable development.”

Such observations reflect the growing recognition that sustainable development requires multi-actor collaboration, where communities, civil society organizations, and academic institutions work together to address complex social and environmental issues.

Conclusion

The first day of field visits on December 3, 2024 provided participants of the IRASEC Winter School with an invaluable opportunity to connect academic discussions on sustainable development with the lived realities of marginalized communities. Through engagements with Tatalon Nanay Power and PANGISDA Pilipinas, participants witnessed how grassroots leadership, community solidarity, and participatory advocacy play crucial roles in addressing social and environmental challenges. More importantly, the experience reinforced a central lesson of the SUDSSEA program: sustainable development is not only about policies, frameworks, or economic indicators—it is fundamentally about people, their struggles, their resilience, and their collective aspirations for dignity, justice, and a sustainable future.

DAY 3

Field Immersion with PISTON, PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines, and KruNaLi Farmers

December 4, 2024

On December 4, 2024, the second day of field immersion activities continued the program's objective of connecting academic discussions on development with the lived experiences of communities navigating economic, environmental, and social transformations in Metro Manila.

Participants were again divided into three groups to engage with different grassroots organizations representing distinct sectors of urban life: transport workers, home-based workers, and urban farming communities. These visits provided valuable insights into how communities organize collectively to respond to structural challenges brought about by urbanization, labor precarity, and changing development policies.

The field visits included engagements with PISTON (Pagkakaisa ng mga Samahan ng Tsuper at Operator Nationwide) in Cubao, Quezon City; PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines in Balingasa, Quezon City; and the KruNaLi Farmers of Krus Na Ligas, an urban farming initiative that promotes food security and community sustainability. Through orientations, interviews, and community walks, participants were able to observe how grassroots organizations mobilize collective action and advocate for more inclusive forms of development.

These engagements reflect the broader principles of participatory development and grassroots organizing, where communities themselves articulate their needs and strategies in addressing economic and social vulnerabilities.

Field Immersion Reflections

Labor Struggles and Urban Mobility: The Case of PISTON

Fieldwork host

PISTON (Pagkakaisa ng mga Samahan ng Tsuper at Operator Nationwide), Jeepney Terminal

Site

Cubao, Quezon City

Researchers assigned

Rafael Vicente Dimalanta

Students

Giang Do Thi Huong, Itthinopwaree Kaewsansuk, Muhammad Ahalla Tsauro, Seila Chea, Supasit Kamkoon, Adzlina Aminnajar, Mai Phuc Thinh

Program

- Visit/orientation at PISTON Office (in Tomas Morato)
- Terminal hopping at Arayat (Cubao-San Juan and Arayat-Fairview Jeepney Operators and Drivers or JODs) and Westpoint (for Quiapo-Divisoria JODs, SERTODA and BERTODA)
- Discussion at PISTON Office

One group visited PISTON, a national alliance of jeepney drivers and operators advocating for the rights and welfare of public transport workers. The visit began with an orientation at the PISTON office in Tomas Morato, followed by terminal hopping activities in Arayat and Westpoint terminals, where participants observed firsthand the daily routines of jeepney drivers.

The visit offered insights into the broader debates surrounding the modernization of public transportation in the Philippines. Drivers shared how policy reforms and modernization programs have created uncertainties for traditional jeepney operators and drivers, many of whom rely on daily earnings to support their families.

For Adzlina Aminnajar (Philippines), the engagement with PISTON resonated strongly with themes of labor rights and social justice. Listening to the narratives of jeepney drivers revealed how public transport workers navigate precarious economic conditions while continuing to provide an essential service to urban commuters.

Ms. Aminnajar reflected that the conversations with drivers highlighted the human dimensions of transportation policies that are often discussed in technical or bureaucratic terms. Behind debates on modernization are workers whose livelihoods depend on their ability to remain part of the public transport system.

The terminal visits further illustrated how jeepney drivers form informal networks of support within their communities. These networks function as spaces where drivers exchange information, coordinate routes, and discuss collective responses to policy changes. Such practices demonstrate how labor organizations and grassroots alliances play crucial roles in representing the interests of marginalized workers within urban governance.

From a broader perspective, the experiences shared by PISTON members reflect wider debates on urban mobility and labor precarity, where modernization initiatives intersect with questions of social protection, employment security, and inclusive urban development.

Informal Labor and Women's Economic Agency: PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines

Fieldwork host

PATAMABA HOMENET Philippines

Site

Barangay Balingasa, Quezon City

Researchers assigned

Ryan Joseph C. Martinez

Students

Kangkana Shivam, Abigail Roa, Lora Batino, Massamon Ketngoen, Nakhem Eom, Yasmin Mangotara, Floris Benjamin, Rajashri Deka

Program

- Orientation of PATAMABA and HomeNet Philippines with executive committee officers
- Visit to PATAMABA Purple Market Depot
- Interview with the community
- Community walk

Another group visited PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines, an organization that represents home-based workers, many of whom are women engaged in informal economic activities such as sewing, food processing, and handicraft

production. The visit included an orientation with PATAMABA's executive committee officers, a tour of the PATAMABA Purple Market Depot, and interviews with community members involved in home-based production networks.

These engagements provided participants with insights into the experiences of workers operating within the informal economy—a sector that remains largely invisible in official labor statistics, yet plays a significant role in sustaining household livelihoods.

For Yasmin Mangotara, who joined the PATAMABA visit, the encounter highlighted the resilience and entrepreneurship of women workers navigating informal economic conditions. Through interviews and conversations with PATAMABA members, participants learned how women organize cooperatives, share resources, and build collective support systems to strengthen their economic opportunities. The visit demonstrated how home-based workers challenge conventional assumptions about labor and productivity. Despite operating outside formal employment structures, these women actively contribute to local economies and develop innovative strategies for sustaining their livelihoods.

The PATAMABA experience also illustrated how collective organizing can empower workers within informal sectors. By forming networks and associations, home-based workers are able to negotiate better market access, share skills, and advocate for recognition within broader labor policy discussions.

These observations align with discussions in development studies regarding the importance of recognizing informal labor and women's economic agency as central components of inclusive development.

Urban Agriculture and Community Sustainability: KruNaLi Farmers

Fieldwork host

KruNaLi Farmers

Site

Barangay Krus Na Ligas, Quezon City

Researchers assigned

Eunice B. Santiago and Junah Amor C. Delfinado

Students

Floper Gershwin Manuel, Jury Met, Phan Thị Kim Tam, Tran Thi Anh Nguyet

Program

- Courtesy call (Barangay Hall)
- Kumustahan and community walk with Ate Marry Ann (KNL Farmer)
- Interview with KruNaLi farmers

The third group visited the KruNaLi Farmers in Barangay Krus Na Ligas, an urban farming initiative that promotes sustainable food systems and community-based environmental stewardship.

The visit began with a courtesy call at the barangay hall, followed by a community walk led by Ate Marry Ann, a local urban farmer who introduced participants to the farming practices and community initiatives implemented in the area. Through interviews and observations, participants learned how urban farming initiatives such as those of KruNaLi Farmers contribute to food security, environmental sustainability, and community resilience within densely populated urban spaces.

For Nguyet Thi Anh Tran, the visit provided an opportunity to observe how urban communities creatively utilize limited spaces to cultivate food and strengthen community bonds. The farming plots not only provide vegetables for household consumption, but also serve as spaces for community cooperation and knowledge sharing.

Urban agriculture initiatives such as the work of the KruNaLi Farmers illustrate how grassroots environmental practices can contribute to broader discussions on sustainable cities and climate resilience. By reclaiming small spaces for cultivation, communities demonstrate alternative approaches to urban sustainability that emphasize local participation and ecological awareness.

Reflections on Grassroots Development and Community Agency

Across the three field sites visited on the second day of immersion, participants observed how communities organize around shared challenges related to labor rights, informal economies, and environmental sustainability. The engagements with PISTON, PATAMABA HomeNet, and KruNaLi Farmers highlighted how grassroots organizations function as important platforms for collective action and community empowerment. These organizations not only address immediate livelihood concerns, but also advocate for structural changes that promote more inclusive and equitable development.

The experiences of jeepney drivers, home-based workers, and urban farmers reveal how development challenges are experienced differently across sectors of society, yet remain interconnected through broader dynamics of urbanization, labor transformation, and environmental change.

Conclusion

The second day of field visits on December 4, 2024 further deepened participants' understanding of how grassroots organizations navigate the complexities of urban development in Metro Manila.

Through engagements with PISTON, PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines, and KruNaLi Farmers, participants observed how communities organize collective responses to labor precarity, informal economic conditions, and environmental challenges.

These experiences reinforced a key lesson of the SUDSSEA program: sustainable development must be understood not only through policies and institutional frameworks, but through the everyday practices of communities who actively shape their own pathways toward resilience, dignity, and social justice.

DAY 4

Lectures

December 5, 2024

Morning Session Lectures

Understanding Communities and Mining in the Philippines

Beverly Besmanos

BANTAY KITA, Non-Government Organization

The morning session of December 5 opened with a presentation by Ms. Beverly Besmanos, the newly appointed National Coordinator of *Bantay Kita* (Profit Watch), a nationwide coalition of more than 80 civil society organizations, academics, and people's organizations working on natural resource governance in the Philippines. Drawing on her experience as both a community organizer and a researcher, Ms. Besmanos offered a searing and data-rich account of the Philippine mining sector, situating it within the broader dynamics of energy transition, governance, and people's struggles.

She began by disclosing her personal trajectory. Though her parents came from an indigenous group in Northern Luzon, she grew up in Mindanao, and she identified herself as a "foreigner" in Manila. This positioning allowed her to bridge different realities: the extractive zones of Mindanao, the marginalized upland communities, and the policy arenas of the capital. Her grounding in lived experience gave the lecture a distinct texture, connecting technical data to community narratives.

Ms. Besmanos then presented a sobering overview of the Philippines' mineral wealth. Citing global surveys, she explained that the country ranks fifth in the world in terms of mineralization, with particularly large deposits of gold, copper, and nickel. According to the US Geological Survey, Philippine mineral resources are valued at over USD 1 trillion. The country is also the only producer of chromium ores in Southeast Asia and, regionally, the second-largest supplier of nickel after Indonesia.

Yet, despite this abundance, the sector contributes very little to the national economy: mining accounts for less than one percent of GDP, 7.8 percent of exports, and only 2.2 percent of government revenues. Compared to the massive excise taxes collected from so-called “sin products” like tobacco, liquor, and sugary beverages—which reach hundreds of billions of pesos annually—the state earns a mere fraction from mining, often only in the millions. “Why,” she recounted communities asking, “do we destroy our environment for mining, when the government earns more from cigarettes and alcohol?”

From this economic critique, she moved to the political dimensions of mining governance. She highlighted how mining companies benefit from tax holidays, fiscal incentives, and minimal royalty obligations. Only those operating inside declared mineral reservations are required to pay a five percent royalty, while others escape with lower or negligible rates. Worse, a 2023 bill passed in Congress proposed to reduce even this small levy from five to three percent, a move Ms. Besmanos attributed to the vested interests of political elites. She cited a 2023 report linking mining companies to the Romualdez family, which occupies key positions in Philippine politics—including the House Speakership and kinship ties to the sitting President. The implication was clear: mining persists not because it benefits the people, but because it sustains elite patronage networks and election war chests.

The heart of the lecture, however, lay in her discussion of community struggles. She shared photographs and case studies documenting how nickel mining operations devastate biodiversity hotspots, river systems, mangrove forests, and farmlands. In one province, a PHP 21-million irrigation system was rendered useless by mining-induced siltation. Farmers lost access to water; fisherfolk reported declining catches as mangrove nurseries died; and entire rivers turned brown and lifeless.

Particularly striking were her stories from small-scale mining communities in Mt. Diwata, Mindanao. Here, thousands of informal miners, including women and children, labor in precarious conditions, often with mercury exposure. Although small-scale mining accounts for 75 percent of the country’s gold production, the sector remains largely informal, leaving environmental destruction unaddressed and revenues untaxed. One photo she presented showed children suffering from mercury poisoning; she noted that one had died in 2021. “This,” she stressed, “is the hidden cost of our gold exports.”

Ms. Besmanos also reflected on the energy transition narrative. While global agreements like the Paris Accord require minerals for batteries and renewable

technologies, she posed the unsettling question: “Are we saving the world at the expense of our small island and upland communities?” She underscored that justice in energy transition must include the voices of those whose lands and waters are being sacrificed for nickel and copper mining.

The lecture then turned to research methods and ethics, as many participants were themselves PhD students or early-career scholars. Ms. Besmanos stressed the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and, crucially, free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) when working with indigenous peoples. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that community members understand the purpose of the research project and its potential impacts. Benefits and risks for the community and research participants should also be carefully considered. Confidentiality is another element in research ethics, where not divulging names or identities of specific persons does not guarantee anonymity. Given the strong social coherence in Filipino culture, revealing information about the study area may have implications on confidentiality. Ms. Besmano also underscored cultural sensitivity as a critical consideration, as well as representation of “local voices and perspectives.” Decolonizing research entails amplifying community voices and working together to address the issues that matter to the community.

With regard to FPIC, Ms. Besmanos said that despite being a landmark legal safeguard under the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, FPIC is often undermined in practice. Studies show that less than half of FPIC processes meet full compliance standards, with frequent manipulation of agreements and widespread negative perceptions among affected communities. She reminded the audience that researchers, too, are accountable: “Communities are not there for us to extract information from. Research must also bring them benefits, however modest, and strengthen their struggles.”

Ms. Besmano’s lecture underscored the contradictions of Philippine mining: the vast mineral wealth and potentials of our reserves yet revenues remain dismal, global green agendas that are overshadowed by cases of local dispossession, and protective policies undermined by widespread environmental destruction. She emphasized that mining is not just about economics or resources—it is about power, justice, and the survival of communities. For scholars, the task is not only to study these contradictions but to stand with those who resist and reimagine alternatives.

Exploring Past Practices in Palawan to Build a Sustainable Future

Prof. Hermine Xhaufclair

School of Archaeology, University of the Philippines Diliman

Prof. Hermine Xhaufclair's lecture² examined how archaeological research in Palawan reveals long-standing sustainable practices among prehistoric communities. The lecture emphasized that sustainability is not merely a contemporary development concept, but is rooted in historical human–environment interactions that can be traced through archaeological evidence.

Drawing from archaeological fieldwork in Palawan, the lecture explored how early communities practiced diversified subsistence systems that combined coastal resource use, hunting, gathering, and small-scale plant cultivation. Archaeological remains such as shell middens, faunal assemblages, and settlement patterns demonstrate how communities utilized marine and forest ecosystems in ways that maintained ecological balance over long periods.

Prof. Xhaufclair highlighted that these archaeological records provide evidence of adaptive strategies that allowed communities to respond to environmental changes without overexploiting local resources. Mobility patterns, seasonal resource use, and the integration of different subsistence practices helped ensure long-term sustainability within fragile island ecosystems.

The lecture also underscored the importance of linking archaeological findings with living traditions among indigenous and local communities in Palawan. Certain environmental practices observed today reflect cultural continuities with earlier ecological knowledge systems, suggesting that traditional ways of interacting with landscapes remain valuable sources of insight for contemporary sustainability discussions.

Within the broader context of the SUDSSEA program, the lecture reinforced how historical and archaeological perspectives can complement field-based social research. By examining long-term human–environment relationships,

2 Xhaufclair, Hermine, Timothy Vitales, Francisco Claravall, David Codeluppi, Xavier Galet, Maricar Belarmino, Gerard Palaya, Jerone Cansino, Dawn Satumbaga, Kate Lim, Emil Robles, and Juan Rofes. 2024. Exploring Past Practices in Palawan to Build a Sustainable Future. Presented at the SUDSSEA Winter School, November 5

archaeology offers important lessons for understanding sustainable resource management and the resilience of local knowledge systems across Southeast Asia.

Afternoon Session Lectures

The Significance and Limits of Adat (Customary) Territory Recognition in Addressing State Territorialization and Rural Agrarian Crises: Insights from Kasepuhan Sukawana, Banten, Indonesia

Mohamad Shohibuddin

Institute Pertanian Bogor (IPB), and Sajogyo Institute, Bogor

The afternoon session began with a presentation by Mohamad Shohibuddin of IPB University, Bogor, Indonesia, and the Sajogyo Institute. His lecture took participants deep into the lived realities of indigenous communities in West Java, examining the paradoxes of state recognition of customary (*adat*) lands. With careful use of maps, diagrams, and case material, Shohibuddin guided the audience through a nuanced argument: recognition, while often celebrated as a progressive policy, can also fragment and weaken traditional agroecological systems.

He began with the question: How does state recognition of indigenous territories reshape local agroecologies? To answer, he situated his case study in the Kasepuhan Sukawana (pseudonym) communities. These communities traditionally maintained complex land-use systems: *leuweng kolot* (sacred forest not to be converted), *leuweng titipan* (reserved forest), *talun* (multi-species agroforests), *huma* (rotational swidden farming), and rice terraces. Such arrangements, he explained, were not only ecological systems but also cultural institutions, binding community members together through norms of reciprocity, rituals, and shared stewardship.

State recognition came in 2006, when Indonesia began granting legal status to “adat forests.” In the case of Kasepuhan Sukawana, 462 hectares inside the park and 24 hectares outside were recognized as customary land. While this was heralded as a victory, Shohibuddin highlighted the fragmentation that ensued. Recognition applied only to forest zones; non-forest areas remained subject to the national land administration system. The result was a dual property

regime: communal rights over adat forest and individual titles over farmlands. This division disrupted the holistic nature of indigenous territoriality.

The consequences were profound. One was the rise of piecemeal land dispossession. Traditional debt systems, where loans were pegged to the price of gold and secured against land mortgages, increasingly led to families losing paddies as inflation raised gold values. Another was the decline of communal labor-sharing systems such as *gacong* (collective harvest sharing) and *pocongan* (bundled rice storage in communal granaries). As wage-based and exclusive labor regimes took over, social safety nets eroded. “What the state recognizes,” Shohibuddin observed, “is only a fragment of the indigenous system. In the process, it decouples culture from ecology.”

He then discussed the commodification pressures unleashed by recognition. Once mapped and certified, parcels became alienable assets, increasingly mortgaged or sold. Initiatives like participatory mapping of *ricik* parcels and the issuance of *risalah tanah* (local land certificates) were meant to limit landholding concentration, but they also opened avenues for credit, debt, and eventual dispossession. State-led conservation agendas likewise redefined forest areas as biodiversity reserves, sidelining indigenous meanings and functions.

The lecture was both sympathetic to indigenous resilience and critical of the structures that reshape it. Shohibuddin concluded that while recognition is necessary, it remains insufficient. Unless it affirms the totality of indigenous life-worlds—territorial, cultural, and social—it risks producing “decoupling:” the breaking apart of the bonds between people, practices, and places.

Participants responded with a mixture of fascination and unease. Questions probed how communities negotiated between traditional and formal land regimes, whether similar patterns could be observed in the Philippines, and how scholars might accompany indigenous groups without reinforcing state simplifications. Shohibuddin’s responses were reflective: “Our task is not to romanticize indigenous systems, nor to abandon them to the market, but to understand their integrity and support their own terms of survival.”

The session reminded participants that even seemingly progressive reforms carry ambivalent effects—and that the fight for sustainability is as much about politics of recognition as it is about ecological stewardship.

Engaged Research on Urban Poor

Assist. Prof. Noreen Sapalo and Dr. Mary Racelis

Department of Anthropology, UP Diliman

Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University

The day closed with a dialogue-style lecture from Dr. Mary Racelis, veteran sociologist and anthropologist from the Ateneo de Manila University, and Asst. Prof. Noreen Sapalo, a young scholar-practitioner working with urban poor organizations. Together, they offered participants both the wisdom of decades of practice and the freshness of contemporary activist research, centering on the ethical and political imperatives of engaged scholarship.

Prof. Racelis opened by situating her own intellectual journey. As one of the first Filipino women trained in anthropology abroad, she reflected on how her early work in urban poor communities of Manila transformed her understanding of research. “I realized,” she said, “that the people I was studying were not objects of analysis but partners in knowledge-making.” This realization became the foundation of her lifelong commitment to engaged research—scholarship that is conducted with and for communities, not merely about them.

Building on this, Asst. Prof. Sapalo described her current work with organizations like DAMPA (*Damayan ng Maralitang Pilipinong Api*), where women leaders organize for housing rights, social services, and protection from demolition. She recounted how academic outputs—maps, timelines, policy briefs—become tools in these struggles, used in negotiations with city governments and in campaigns for land tenure security. Research, in this sense, is not just descriptive but instrumental in advocacy and collective action.

Their lecture emphasized the principles of engaged research: (1) Co-generation of knowledge: Research questions should be defined together with communities, not imposed externally, (2) Long-term commitment: Engagements must go beyond project cycles; relationships should be nurtured over years, even decades, (3) Moral positioning: Neutrality, they insisted, is an illusion. In contexts of injustice, scholars have a responsibility to take sides, (4) Reciprocity and accountability: Research must bring tangible benefits to communities, whether through training, advocacy support, or direct improvements in their struggles.

Dr. Racelis illustrated these principles with vivid anecdotes: returning research information back to the affected communities for their review and use; assisting

leaders of informal settlers' federations write and publish their own stories of struggle; and enabling women leaders' testimonies to reach policymakers. Each example reinforced her conviction that the best research emerges when scholars stand shoulder to shoulder with the marginalized.

Asst. Prof. Sapalo, for her part, highlighted the challenges young researchers face. Funding constraints, academic expectations for neutrality, and institutional barriers often discourage activist commitments. Yet, she argued, these barriers must be confronted: "If our research does not help dismantle structures of exclusion, then we are complicit in maintaining them." Her words struck a chord with many in the room, especially the younger fellows navigating similar tensions.

The session concluded with a robust discussion. Questions ranged from how to sustain relationships with communities after projects end, to how to negotiate with institutions resistant to activist scholarship. Prof. Racelis offered sage advice: listen to, learn from and respect the views of excluded groups. Enable them to speak for themselves, drawing on their indigenous knowledge and new learnings to prioritize their issues. As for engaged academics: humility, consistency, and patience! Asst. Prof. Sapalo added that researchers must be ready to share risk, standing with communities not only in their victories but also in their vulnerabilities.

The two speakers left participants with a powerful message: engaged research is not a methodological choice but an ethical stance. For Winter School fellows preparing for their own field immersions, this was both a challenge and an inspiration—to conduct research that is accountable, activist, and oriented toward social justice.

DAY 5

Solidarity Night

December 6, 2024

Solidarity and Celebration: The SUDSSEA 2024 Solidarity Night

As the week-long activities of the SUDSSEA 2024 Winter School drew to a close, participants gathered for the Solidarity Night held on December 6, 2024 at the UP Hotel Ballroom. After several days of lectures, discussions, and field immersion activities, the evening provided a special moment for participants, organizers, and community partners to celebrate the relationships and shared experiences that had developed throughout the program.

The program opened with welcoming remarks from Dr. Gabriel Facal, Deputy Director of the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC), followed by a message from representatives of UP CIDS. Their messages reflected on the significance of bringing together scholars, students, and grassroots communities in meaningful dialogue on development issues in Southeast Asia.

A video presentation highlighting the SUDSSEA program was screened, capturing moments from the lectures, workshops, and field immersion visits conducted earlier in the week. For many participants, the video served as a reminder of how quickly the days had passed and how deeply the experiences had resonated with everyone involved.

One memorable moment from the evening was the celebration of cultural diversity among the participants. Many fellows arrived wearing traditional attire from their respective countries, transforming the ballroom into a vibrant display of Southeast Asian cultures. The atmosphere was festive yet meaningful, as the clothing symbolized both individual identities and the shared regional connections that the Winter School had fostered.

The evening was further enriched by the presence of community partners who had participated in the field immersion activities. Representatives from Tatalon Nanay Power, PANGISDA Pilipinas, PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines, PISTON, and the KruNaLi urban farmers of Krus Na Ligas joined the celebration, making the event not only a gathering of scholars but

also a reunion with the communities whose stories had shaped the learning experience of the week.

In a gesture that reflected the spirit of solidarity and mutual support, members of PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines brought several of their handmade products to the event. Participants eagerly visited their display, happily purchasing items and engaging in conversations with the women behind the crafts. These interactions went beyond simple transactions—they became opportunities to appreciate the skills, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit of home-based workers whose livelihoods are often overlooked in formal economic systems.

Equally heartwarming was the contribution from Tatalon Nanay Power, whose members brought traditional Filipino *kakanin* to share with the participants. The sweet delicacies quickly became a favorite among attendees, and the act of sharing food created an atmosphere that felt less like a formal program and more like a gathering among friends and extended family. The presence of these community partners reminded everyone that the Winter School was not only about academic exchange but also about building genuine human connections.

Throughout the evening, participants from different countries shared cultural performances that further strengthened the spirit of camaraderie. Thai fellows performed a group song, while Rajashri presented a traditional Indian dance that captivated the audience. Cambodian participants performed a lively traditional song and dance, inviting the crowd to join in the celebration. Vietnamese fellows followed with musical performances accompanied by elements of traditional dress and choreography.

These performances were not merely entertainment; they became expressions of cultural pride and solidarity. The room was filled with laughter, applause, and moments of spontaneous participation as participants cheered one another on.

Equally meaningful were the solidarity messages delivered by the community partners. Representatives from Tatalon Nanay Power, PANGISDA Pilipinas, PATAMABA HomeNet Philippines, PISTON, and the KruNaLi Farmers expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to engage with the Winter School participants. Their words reminded everyone that the issues discussed during the program—labor rights, environmental sustainability, informal economies, and community resilience—are lived realities that continue long after the academic discussions end.

As the formal program gradually gave way to informal moments, the evening concluded with open microphone sessions and shared performances that allowed participants to sing, dance, and celebrate together. Scholars, community members, and organizers mingled freely, exchanging stories, laughter, and reflections about the week's experiences.

In many ways, the Solidarity Night captured the true spirit of the SUDSSEA Winter School. The lectures and workshops had provided critical perspectives on development, while the field visits had revealed the everyday struggles and resilience of grassroots communities. The evening's celebration, however, reminded participants that beyond academic inquiry lies the importance of empathy, cultural exchange, and genuine human connection.

The following day, December 7, 2024, participants formally concluded the Winter School through the presentation of their final reports and the closing ceremonies. Yet for many participants, the memories of the Solidarity Night—shared food, cultural performances, laughter, and conversations with community partners—remained one of the most meaningful moments of the entire program. It was a night that celebrated not only the diversity of Southeast Asia, but also the solidarity that can emerge when scholars and communities come together to learn from one another.

DAY 6

Closing Program

December 7, 2024

Fellows' Research Proposal Presentations and Closing Program

The final day of the SUDSSEA culminated in the fellows' research presentations, marking the intellectual culmination of the two-week academic training. The session provided a platform for fellows to present the research proposals they initially submitted during the application process while reflecting on how the lectures, field engagements, and discussions throughout the program had shaped and refined their research trajectories.

Taken together, the presentations revealed the breadth of sustainability concerns across Southeast Asia and neighboring regions, ranging from post-conflict reconstruction and gender empowerment to environmental governance, agricultural transformation, and technological innovation in disaster risk reduction.

The session opened with a presentation by Giang Do Thi Huong on her research, "Territorial Branding for Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development in Vietnam," which explores how place-based branding strategies can support sustainable livelihoods while preserving cultural heritage and biodiversity. The study emphasizes the importance of participatory mapping and community engagement in ensuring that development initiatives remain grounded in local knowledge and collective stewardship of resources.

The next presenter was Itthinopwaree Kaewsansuk, whose study "Dynamism of Cassava Politics in the Northeast of Thailand (1977–2023)" examines how cassava production has transformed rural livelihoods, agrarian systems, and regional political dynamics. By linking agricultural commodities with broader institutional and electoral developments, the research demonstrates the interconnected nature of agriculture, governance, and political economy.

The presentations then shifted toward urban environmental governance through Nuttawat Unjitlerd's study, "The Irony of (Un)Happyland: Hidden Heroes and the Uneven Benefits in Manila's Sustainability Chain." His research explores the everyday realities of residents in Barangay 105, commonly known as

“Happyland” in Manila, where informal waste workers contribute significantly to recycling and environmental sustainability. Yet, despite their central role in the urban waste economy, these communities continue to experience environmental hazards and socio-economic marginalization, revealing the uneven distribution of benefits within sustainability initiatives.

The political dimensions of environmental governance were addressed in the presentation of Muhammad Ahalla Tsauro, whose research investigates the involvement of religious elites in Indonesia’s mining industry. By examining the interactions between religious organizations, political actors, and business interests, the study offers a critical perspective on how narratives of development and prosperity can obscure the structural drivers of environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality.

Continuing discussions on environmental governance, Kangkana Shivam presented her research examining human-wildlife conflicts in banana-producing regions of Assam, India. Her study analyzes how agricultural expansion and environmental pressures have intensified interactions between farming communities and elephant populations, raising complex questions about environmental governance, risk management, and the socio-political dynamics shaping rural livelihoods.

In line with agricultural transformation and rural development, Abigail Roa presented a comparative study on rice production practices in Vietnam and the Philippines, examining how climate change affects agricultural productivity and how farmers adapt while pursuing more sustainable and resilient food systems. Drawing from insights gained during the Winter School, the study integrates environmental governance, community participation, and interdisciplinary approaches to strengthen comparative agricultural research across Southeast Asia.

Building on the discussion of post-conflict recovery, Lora Batino presented “Political Ecology of Adaptation in Southeast Asia,” which explores how climate change is embedded within society and how existing power relations produce unequal patterns of vulnerability and adaptation. By approaching adaptation through the lens of environmental justice, the study emphasizes that responses to climate change are shaped not only by environmental conditions but also by governance, inequality, and community experiences.

While several presentations focused on the governance of natural resources, Massamon Ketgoen introduced a technological perspective on sustainability

through her research on adapting the Philippines' Project NOAH disaster warning system for landslide and flash flood alerts in Northern Thailand. Her study highlights how technological innovations and cross-border cooperation can strengthen disaster preparedness in regions increasingly exposed to climate-related hazards.

Environmental awareness among younger generations was addressed in the presentation of Seila Chea, whose research aims to investigate the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the youth regarding single-use plastics. By examining the factors influencing plastic consumption among young people, the study underscores the importance of education and behavioral change in addressing environmental sustainability challenges.

Introducing another dimension of sustainable development, Supasit Kamkoon presented "Food Choices: Sustainable Development About Food from Micro to Macro," which explores how social and cultural factors shape food choices among university students in Bangkok and how these everyday decisions relate to environmental sustainability. The study broadens discussions on food systems by linking individual consumption patterns with sustainable cities, social equity, and environmental responsibility.

Adzlina Aminnajar, whose research titled "Empowering Moro Women: Exploring USAID's Gender-Focused Interventions Amid Marawi's Transition to Sustainable Peace in Sagonsongan, Lanao del Sur", examines the experiences of displaced Moro women following the 2017 Marawi Siege. Her study foregrounded the role of gender-sensitive development interventions in supporting women's economic participation and social empowerment in post-conflict communities. By situating women's livelihoods within the broader context of recovery and peacebuilding in the Bangsamoro region, the research will highlight the intersection of gender, development policy, and sustainable peace.

The theme of livelihoods and marginality continued through the work of Nakhem Eom, whose study examines the conditions of informal waste pickers at the Dangkao landfill in Phnom Penh. By analyzing the structural factors that shape the precarious livelihoods of waste-picking communities, the research underscores the need for inclusive policy frameworks that recognize the contributions of informal labor to urban sustainability while addressing systemic inequalities.

Women's participation in sustainable peacebuilding was revisited through Yasmin M. Mangotara's study, "Babae para sa Kapayapaan: A Comparative Study of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in the BARMM and CAR." By comparing the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera Administrative Region, the research explores how differing political, historical, and cultural contexts shape women's roles in peacebuilding and the institutional factors influencing their meaningful participation in sustainable peace.

Meanwhile, Floris Benjamin synthesized his Winter School experience by emphasizing that sustainable development research must remain interdisciplinary, participatory, and grounded in the lived realities of communities. Drawing on lessons from lectures, field immersions, and scholarly exchanges, he underscored the importance of integrating governance, environmental justice, inequality, and community resilience into research that is both academically rigorous and socially responsive.

The presentations then turned toward indigenous communities through Rajashri Deka's research examining how tribal communities in Guwahati City have experienced urban development over time. By analyzing changes in land rights, cultural practices, governance, and power relations, the study highlights the continuing challenges faced by indigenous communities navigating rapid urbanization.

The cultural and ecological dimensions of sustainability were highlighted in the presentation of Floper Gershwin E. Manuel, whose research "Philippine Rice Heritage in the Capitalocene" seeks to examine traditional rice varieties and indigenous agricultural knowledge systems. His work explores how rice cultivation practices embody both cultural heritage and ecological relationships, offering important insights into the evolving connections between agriculture, society, and environmental change.

Environmental sustainability in agricultural landscapes was further explored in the presentation of Met Jury, whose research focuses on the barriers and opportunities for scaling agroecological practices in Phnom Kulen National Park in Cambodia. The research seeks to analyze how increasing agricultural expansion and land-use change have placed pressure on forest ecosystems, while also considering how agroecological approaches may provide pathways for balancing environmental conservation with livelihood needs.

The theme of resource governance continued in the presentation of Phan Thi Kim Tam, who aims to examine collective action in common-pool resource management in Vietnam's northern mountainous areas. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of commons governance, her research will examine how institutional arrangements and community cooperation shape the sustainable management of shared natural resources.

Shifting attention to the intersection of gender and environmental vulnerability, Tran Thi Anh Nguyet presented her research on water insecurity in mountainous regions of Vietnam. Her study highlights how limited access to clean water disproportionately affects women, who often bear the responsibility of securing water for household needs. In doing so, the research illuminates the gendered dimensions of climate change and emphasizes the need for integrated development strategies that address both environmental sustainability and gender equity.

Taken together, the fellows' presentations underscored the interdisciplinary nature of sustainable development research and highlighted the interconnected challenges facing communities across Southeast Asia. Despite their varied geographical and thematic focus, the studies collectively addressed key issues of environmental justice, governance of natural resources, gender equality, and community resilience.

The session concluded with a discussion and feedback exchange among fellows and mentors, providing participants with an opportunity to refine their research questions and methodological approaches. More importantly, the dialogue reinforced the collaborative spirit of the winter school, fostering intellectual exchange among emerging scholars committed to advancing sustainable development studies in the region.

Group Final Presentations

The final segment of the SUDSSEA Winter School featured five group presentations that synthesized insights drawn from the fellows' field immersion activities, lectures, and collective discussions throughout the week. Each group approached the synthesis differently—some through analytical slide presentations and others through creative formats such as video reflections—but together they offered a multidimensional understanding of sustainable development, grassroots organizing, and the lived realities of marginalized communities in Metro Manila.

The themes discussed by the five groups are as follows:

- Group 1: Development, Sustainability, and the Taumbayan, presented by Muhammad Ahalla Tsauro, Itthinopwaree Kaewsansuk, Giang Do Thi Huong, and Nuttawat Unjitlerd
- Group 2: Let's Talk about Tatalon Nanay Power, Jeepneys & HomeNet, presented by Lora Batino, Abigail Roa, Massamon Ketngoen, and Kangkana Shivam
- Group 3: Tatalon and Jeepneys, presented by Seila Chea, Supasit Kamkoon, Adzlina Aminnajar, and Mai Phuc Thinh
- Group 4: Fieldwork reflections [Video presentation], presented by Floris Benjamin, Yasmin Mangotara, Nakhem Eom, and Rajashri Dekka
- Group 5: External Forces Affecting the Land and Commons, presented by Floper Gershwin Manuel, Tran Thi Anh Nguyet, Phan Thi Kim Tam, and Met Jury

Linking Theory and Practice in the Field

Several groups emphasized the importance of connecting theoretical discussions from the lectures with real-world observations during the field visits. This theme was particularly highlighted in the reflections presented by Group 4, composed of Floris Benjamin, Yasmin Mangotara, Nakhem Eom, and Rajashri Dekka, who presented their insights through a short video rather than a conventional slide presentation. Their video emphasized how field immersion created a meaningful bridge between classroom discussions and lived experiences in communities.

One of the reflections from the video underscored this experiential learning process:

"It is one thing to read the theory, and completely another to push and pull at theory through the experiences of people subject to harsher sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions."

Another reflection captured the emotional and intellectual impact of the field visits:

"I came completely armed with excitement and ideas of sociopolitical systems, only to come home undeniably disarmed."

Through these reflections, the group emphasized that meaningful research on development must move beyond theoretical analysis and engage directly with communities whose everyday experiences reveal the complexities of social and economic systems.

Grassroots Organizing and Community Resilience

The presentations also highlighted the role of grassroots organizations in addressing social and environmental challenges. Group 3, composed of Seila Chea, Supasit Kamkoon, Adzlina G. Aminnajar, and Mai Phuc Thinh, focused their presentation on their visits to Tatalon Nanay Power and PISTON, a national alliance of transport workers.

Their analysis of Tatalon Nanay Power, a women-led community organization in Barangay Tatalon, Quezon City, illustrated how community-based initiatives can empower marginalized populations. The group described the organization as a "women-led community-based organization based in Tatalon Barangay, Quezon City... [within an] urban poor community."

Through community trainings, mutual support networks, and partnerships with local institutions, the organization works to address challenges such as flooding, waste management, and limited livelihood opportunities. According to Group 3's presentation, residents continue to confront structural challenges including "flash floods, waste pollution, and limited livelihood opportunities," yet sustain collective initiatives through volunteer work and community organizing.

Political Economy of Urban Livelihoods

Another key theme across the presentations was the political economy of urban livelihoods, particularly in the transport sector. Group 3 also examined the work of PISTON. As the group explained, PISTON was established in 1981 and is rooted in grassroots activism, representing a broader struggle for "social

justice, labor rights, and equitable access to livelihood amidst evolving urban policies and modernization initiatives.”

The fellows also critically examined the Philippine government’s Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP) introduced in 2017. While the program aims to modernize public transport and promote environmental sustainability, Group 3 highlighted the tensions between policy goals and socioeconomic realities. According to their presentation, although modernization promises environmental sustainability and improved efficiency, the “economic impact on small operators” and the potential “cultural loss” associated with phasing out traditional jeepneys raise significant concerns.

These observations resonated with broader discussions during the Winter School regarding the intersection of sustainability policies and social justice. The fellows argued that environmental policies must also consider the livelihoods of marginalized workers to ensure a just transition rather than reinforcing existing inequalities.

Critiques of Development and Capitalist Exploitation

Several groups extended these observations into broader critiques of development models. One group presentation argued that development initiatives often privilege economic elites while leaving marginalized communities vulnerable. This critique was captured in the statement:

“Under the name of development projects, most benefits go to capitalists while the poor is left behind and sometimes exploited.”

This reflection echoed the lectures delivered during the winter school on alternative development and political economy, reinforcing the importance of examining development processes through critical and historically grounded perspectives.

Community Solidarity and Alternative Development Paradigms

Another recurring theme across the presentations was the importance of community solidarity. Several fellows observed that grassroots organizations and informal networks provide crucial support systems for communities facing economic precarity and environmental risks. As one group summarized succinctly that “community solidarity is crucial for community development.”

In their reflections, Group 4 further connected these observations to broader discussions on alternative development paradigms. Drawing inspiration from the communities they visited, the fellows suggested that grassroots practices and indigenous knowledge systems may offer valuable alternatives to dominant models of capitalist modernization. One reflection emphasized that communities themselves demonstrate alternative pathways toward sustainability:

“Their sheer act of defiance to secure a place within the system... teaches us about alternative paradigms of development.”

These insights reinforced the idea that local knowledge and community practices should be considered essential components of sustainable development research.

Feedback on the Fieldwork Component

In addition to presenting analytical reflections, the fellows also offered constructive feedback regarding the field immersion component of the program. While they expressed strong appreciation for the diversity of field sites and the opportunity to engage directly with communities, some participants suggested expanding opportunities for research-oriented engagement. One recommendation proposed:

“Initiate more opportunities for participants and researchers to be together in class and fieldwork.”

Such suggestions reflected the fellows’ desire to further integrate academic discussions with practical field experiences in future iterations of the program.

Concluding Reflections

Taken together, the five group presentations illustrated how the SUDSSEA Winter School created a space for interdisciplinary dialogue, experiential learning, and collaborative reflection. Through their analyses of urban poor communities, grassroots organizations, labor movements, and development policies, the fellows demonstrated that sustainable development must be understood not only as a technical or policy-driven agenda but as a deeply social and political process shaped by power relations, community agency, and lived experience.

More importantly, the presentations reaffirmed a central lesson of the program: meaningful scholarship on development requires humility, critical engagement, and solidarity with the communities whose experiences challenge and enrich academic knowledge.

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The Program on Alternative Development (AltDev) aims to look at paradigms, policies, practices, and projects that are largely marginalized and excluded from the mainstream. As they challenge dominant modes, they do not figure prominently in the national and international discourse.

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