

The Asia Pacific Research Network is network of leading research NGOs across the region.

As Framework Partner Agreement signatory organization with the European Commission, APRN is implementing the Action "Building Peoples Organizations' Capacities to Claim their Rights and Sustainable Development". This Action aims to empower communities and people's movements to face globalization and claim their rights through building their capacities on people's research, education and information, advocacy, and development effectiveness.

In order to contribute towards this over-all objective, APRN sets out the following immediate objectives:

- individual and collective advocacy to influence development policy at all levels
- knowledge building and information-dissemination through people's research, information and education, and advocacy on emergent issues along the following themes: Trade and Development, Regional Integration and Connectivity, Natural Resources, Peace and Security, and Development Effectiveness
- People's organizations/Civil Society Organizations own Development Effectiveness

Building evidence-based information through research to ensure that policy analysis and alternative policy proposals are rational and relevant to the grassroots and marginalized; training and other capacity development interventions; and advocacy and multi-stakeholder dialogue inform the methods of implementation towards achieving the immediate objectives.



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Research Conference on Free Trade Agreements in Asia Pacific

Towards a Pro-People Economy & Trade Agenda

January 25-29, 2021



PROGRAM



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Rationale

The world economy has been living off stimulus packages since the global financial crisis in 2008. Since then, the people of the world have been experiencing worsening crisis due to joblessness, high prices, and continuing resource grabs. Even social hegemonies that flex dominant economies such as the US, China, and Russia are ticking time bombs of recession. To abate the intensity of the looming crisis, these countries are desperately competing over the global market through bilateral, regional, and mega trade deals. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, militarized lockdowns failed to contain the spread of the virus worldwide affecting every aspect of the global economy. The disruption of the supply-chain of the manufacturing industry and decreased work of the service sector have led to millions of job losses worldwide and resulted in far-reaching effects and consequences that could potentially lead to the worst recession in history.

Poor countries with high COVID-19 cases have been the most vulnerable and are suffering the most from the health and economic crisis. Multilateral and transnational companies have been more than eager to prey on their citizens. In the case of Bangladesh, for instance, there are 388, 569 COVID-19 cases and the numbers continue to rise. Reports indicate that at least one million garments workers lost their jobs during the first month of quarantine. Workers from the second largest clothing manufacturer in the world already living below poverty line are being sent home without pay. Garment workers in Bangladesh receive a measly US\$ 97 a month, only a dollar more than the minimum wage of US\$ 96 a month. H&M, Target, JCPenney, Kohl's, and Walmart are some of the fashion brands outsourcing Bangladeshi factories. This is a common situation in poor countries especially those that are hemmed in by unfair trade deals.

Eager to dominate, China has expedited the clandestine process of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. This was signed during the 37th ASEAN Summit. RCEP like previous trade deals is widely criticized due to its potential adverse impacts. International

Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), and USAID continue to profit from aid packages COVID-19 response. Placing the aid packages under closer scrutiny would lead one to conclude that these are loans with worse modalities of payment. China has been pushing its massive infrastructure development project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to consolidate its influence across the Global South by dangling loans to countries under the Health Silk Road program. These loans, however, are subject to conditionalities like further liberalization and deregulation of local economies. These conditionalities remain aligned with the neoliberal development finance framework as imposed by FTAs.

Objectives

As a Framework Partnership Agreement Signatory Organization to the European Union implementing the Action, “Building People’s Organizations Capacities to Claim their Rights and Sustainable Development”, one of APRN’s activities is to build capacities of CSOs and POs to conduct research on Trade and Development. Through this research conference focused on Free Trade Agreements in Asia Pacific in the time of COVID-19, the Network intends to increase the people’s understanding of the impacts of global and regional policies at the national level. Further, the research conference has the following objectives:

1. To share evidence and experiences as emergent research issues on FTAs;
2. Expose the specific impacts of FTAs in the comprehensive aspects of economy; and,
3. Foster the discourse and craft research on alternatives and people’s transformative economics post pandemic.

Program of Activities

Day 1

January 25

Morning Session

9:45 – 10:10	<p>Preliminaries</p> <p>Welcome Message and House Rules</p> <p>Pooja Moitra Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE)</p> <p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>Azra Talat Sayeed Roots for Equity, Pakistan Chairperson, APRN Board of Conveners</p>
10:08 – 10:25	<p>Keynote Address: On the Prospects of People’s Struggles against the Neoliberal Agenda</p> <p>Victor Garces International League of People’s Struggles</p>
10:25 – 10:40	<p>Open Forum</p>
10:40 – 10:55	<p>Keynote Address: On Economic Sovereignty</p> <p>Sonny Africa IBON Foundation, Philippines</p>
10:55 – 11:10	<p>Open Forum</p>
11:10 – 11:13	<p>Synthesis</p> <p>Jazminda Lumang APRN Secretary General</p>

Day 2 January 26

Morning Session

Panel 1: Asia Pacific: Genuine Agrarian Reform and Food Security are Key to Rural and National Development

The role of agriculture is fundamental in attaining rural development and ensuring economic growth. For this reason, there are many critical issues faced by rural-based sectors in the Asia Pacific region where most nations have agriculture-based economies. In the past decades, the development of agriculture and rural economies has declined due to economic strategies derived from neoliberal foreign and national policies. In particular, these policies have generated the increase of agricultural commodities that are directed toward exportation and have consequences in production for local consumption. The proliferation of agri-business, plantations and chemical-based production has resulted in continuing land grabs and seed monopoly that fuel poverty and hunger among the people.

The panel looks at major issues that impede agricultural and rural development highlighting particular cases and experiences in terms of advocating for genuine agrarian reform and food security in the region. The presentations will review important literature and relevant publications on policies on agriculture imposed by development actors such as the UN. The research in this panel also reviews the impact of bilateral and multilateral agreements on agriculture. From the concerns on irrigation systems; farm-to-market roads; farm inputs and post-harvest support; and food security; the presentations will draw out important recommendations and points for collaborative research and coordinated campaigns on the theme.

9:45 – 10:00	<p>Preliminaries</p> <p>Welcome Message</p> <p>Kartini Samon GRAIN</p>
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10:00 – 10:15	<p>On Genuine Agrarian Reform – Trade and Investment Liberalization and Genuine Agrarian Reform</p> <p>Rafael Mariano Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Peasant Movement of the Philippines)</p>
	<p>Video on genuine agrarian reform</p>
10:15 – 11:00	<p>Research Presentations</p> <p>“Land Use as a Site of Contestation: Social Narratives of Displaced Peasants (Dan Oan) in Duong Noi, Hanoi”</p> <p>Maria Ima Carmela L. Ariate Asia Pacific Research Network</p> <p>“Agriculture and the Farmers in the Context of Trade in Bangladesh”</p> <p>Farida Akhter UBINIG: Policy Research for Development Alternatives, Bangladesh</p>
11:00-11:15	<p>Open Forum</p>

Panel 2: Environmental Degradation and the Climate Emergency in the Asia Pacific: Pro-people development and environmental sustainability versus neoliberal notions of development

There is already a consensus among governments and organizations across the globe when it comes to the urgency of addressing the threats of climate change. According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change comprised of leading climate scientists, the world has only a dozen years to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius, “beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people” (Watts, 2018). We are living in a climate emergency. The cause of climate emergency and

the level of sincerity and commitment of governments and big corporations in protecting the environment and meeting global climate goals need to be questioned.

This panel aims to show how environmental degradation the region stems from loopholes in existing laws, poor implementation of policies, and problematic trade agreements inclined towards profit motive and the interests of the elite. On the other hand, the panels aims to put forward the idea of pro-people development and environmental sustainability as opposed to neoliberal notions of development that prioritizes superficial measures of economic growth at the expense of the most vulnerable sectors and the environment.

Research in this panel looks into neoliberal globalization’s unsustainable consumption and production approach - the unhampered extraction of natural resources and the consequent environmental degradation in Asia Pacific. Research presentations describe the exploitation of natural resources in several countries in the region and how this has worsened the impact of climate change and natural disasters. This exposition is juxtaposed against the role of governments, policy, and international trade agreements in the continuing deterioration of the environment.

Watts, J. (2018, October 8). We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-mustnot-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report>

11:15 – 11:30	<p>On Environmental Protection</p> <p>Jiten Yumnam Center for Research and Advocacy Manipur, India</p>
	<p>Video presentation on environmental protection</p>

11:30 – 12:00	<p>Research Presentations</p>
	<p>“Fishing for Access – WTO Fisheries Subsidies Negotiations Undermining Small-Scale Fishers and Control of Natural Resources in the Global South”</p> <p>Adam Wolfenden Pacific Network on Globalization, Fiji</p> <p>“The Potential Alternatives to Neoliberal Mining in Didipio, Philippines”</p> <p>Lia Alonzo Center for Environmental Concerns, Philippines</p>
12:00 – 12:10	<p>Open Forum</p>
12:10– 12:15	<p>Panel 1 and Panel 2 Summing Up</p>

Afternoon Session

1:45 – 2:00	<p>Preliminaries</p>
2:00 – 2:20	<p>Workshop 1: On Genuine Agrarian Reform and Environmental Protection</p> <p>Moderator: People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Discuss the current or negotiated free trade agreements and their impact or implications on genuine agrarian reform and environmental protection;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Identify emergent research issues on the workshop themes that can be areas of cooperation and collaboration; and, c. Bring to the fore policies on genuine agrarian reform and environmental protection that would contribute towards a pro-people economy and trade agenda.
3:20 – 3:15	Report Back
3:50 – 4:00	Synthesis and Conclusion of Day 2

Day 3 January 27

Morning Session

Panel 3: National Industrialization in the Asia-Pacific: Toward strong, self-reliant, and equitable economies

In many developing countries, one of the main contributors to joblessness and poverty is industrial backwardness characterized by lack of heavy industries. This is at the root of systemic problems that have long plagued least developed countries. The outcome of such systemic problem is an import-dependent and export-oriented economy. Labor precarities push many to seek work overseas. As Tapang (2014) said, "Building national industries is the key to the establishment of a modern and diversified industrial economy that will satisfy our basic industrial and consumer needs, secure jobs and livelihood for our people as well as ensure rapid and sustained economic growth for the country."

National industrialization is not a new concept. Many governments in the Asia-Pacific have towed the line of the neoliberal paradigm in crafting domestic economic policies. History, however, has shown that through policies that serve the neoliberal agenda, many states have failed to empower their own

industries and people, and instead allowed transnational corporations and foreign powers to exploit their human and natural resources. Policy-makers have intentionally or unintentionally dismissed national industrialization in favor of leveraging the private sector and foreign corporations. This has largely prevented significant or meaningful progress in the fight against poverty and inequality.

Research work in this panel delves into the concept of national industrialization, its extent in Asia Pacific, and the long-enduring campaigns for national industrialization. It looks at the characteristics of national industrialization as the strategic paradigm towards strong, self-reliant, and equitable economies in the Global South. The panel also investigates how governments regard the idea of national industrialization and how this translates to domestic economic policies.

Tapang, G. (2014, February 12). What went wrong? No national industrialization! The Manila Times: <https://www.manilatimes.net/2014/02/12/opinion/columnists/what-went-wrong-no-national-industrialization/75282/>

9:45 – 10:02	Preliminaries
	<p>Welcome Message</p> <p>Noel Colina Asia Monitor Resource Center, Hong Kong</p>
10:02 – 10:15	<p>On National Industrialization</p> <p>Peter Murphy Workins, (Country)</p>
	Video on national industrialization

Panel 4: The Faux Financial Stability in Neoliberal Monetary System

With the unprecedented health and economic crisis brought by the pandemic, most countries in Asia Pacific have been realigning national allocations and foreign trade policies to deal with the adverse effects of COVID-19. According to reports, these announcements include emergency liquidity and macroprudential policy aside from the existing monetary and fiscal regulations.

Historically, during every economic and financial crisis, governments the world over have applied a financial regulation approach. This puts greater liability on the state at the expense of its constituents. This approach aims to provide more ease to big financial businesses and corporations.

Instead of the dominance of neoliberal monetary policies of financial institutions, stricter financial regulations on local and national economies should be put in place to veer away from overborrowing, excessive risk-taking, and being debt-driven.

The panel addresses the systemic problems and inefficiencies of existing fiscal and monetary policies and strategies in dealing with economic crisis. The analyses are iteratively developed from the lessons learned during previous financial crises and economic meltdowns. The research presentations in this panel aim to raise the discourse and awareness about the current state of financial markets and provide recommendations on how to reform global financial institutions towards being service and people-oriented.

10:15 – 10:25	Video on monetary and fiscal policy
10:25 – 11:10	<p>Research Presentations</p> <p>“Women’s Stake in National Development: Challenges and Ways Forward”</p> <p>Cielito V. Perez Center for Women’s Resources, Philippines</p>

	<p>“WTO and Global Free Trade Agreements Harmful to People’s Livelihoods and the Climate Crisis, from the Perspective of Japan’s Trade Policy”</p> <p>Shoko Uchia Pacific Resource Center, Japan</p> <p>“The effects of neoliberal policies on the Filipino workers and in the Philippine economy”</p> <p>Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education Research, Philippines</p>
11:10-11:40	Open Forum
11:40-11:45	Panel 3 and Panel 4 Summing Up

Afternoon Session

1:45 – 2:00	Preliminaries
2:00 – 2:20	<p>Workshop 2: On National Industrialization and Monetary and Fiscal Policy</p> <p>Moderator:</p> <p>Lee Jann Philippe S. Abes APRN Secretariat</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the current or negotiated free trade agreements and their impact or implications on national industrialization and monetary and fiscal policy; Identify emergent research issues on the workshop themes that can be areas of cooperation and collaboration; and, Bring to the fore policies on national industrialization and monetary and fiscal policy that would contribute towards a pro-people economy and trade agenda.

3:20 – 3:15	Report Back
3:50 – 4:00	Synthesis and Conclusion of Day 3

Day 4

January 28

Morning Session

Panel 5: The Trade and Foreign Policy of Developing Countries in the Asia-Pacific: Delving into the Role of China and International Financial Institutions

Trade and foreign policy of a country are inextricable from each other, as nations structure their foreign policy according to trade interests. For one, in the 18th century, British foreign policy, through the British East India Company, focused on South Asia so that it can maintain its economic preeminence in the trade of raw materials for textile such as cotton. American trade interests are the primary motivation for their pivot to Asia.

This panel compares contemporary trade and foreign policies of developing countries in the Asia Pacific in terms of history, political system, and robustness of socio-economic structures. This panel seeks to examine China as one of the biggest economies in the world especially in the context of its 'trade war' with the U.S. Trade and foreign policies are also discussed in relation to the role of international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and World Trade Organization, and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

It may be hypothesized that trade and foreign policy of developing countries continue to be skewed toward the interests of superpowers, in this case China, and the IFIs. The current policies, actions, and declarations of governments in these developing countries suggest that this will continue in the years to come, unless a structural intervention takes place. Second, despite projections of economic growth, inequalities will widen in these countries partly because of policies and programs stemming from the trade and foreign policy, such as participation in mega free trade deals like the recently signed Regional Economic Comprehensive Partnership. Third, it is not only domestic inequalities that will increase, the gap between developing and developed countries in the

Asia-Pacific will also widen because of the current configuration of trade and foreign policy. Recommendations can focus on re-structuring the trade and foreign policy of developing countries in the Asia-Pacific.

	Preliminaries
9:45 – 10:00	Welcome Message Nurgul Djanaeva Forum of Women NGOs, Kyrgyzstan
10:00 – 10:15	On Trade and Foreign Policy Lei Covero IBON International, Philippines
	Video on trade and foreign policy
	Research Presentations
	“Socio-Political Impacts of Foreign Trade in the National Vaccination Policy against CoViD-19 in Indonesia” Kurniawan Sabar Institute for Nationalist and Democracy Studies, Indonesia
10:15 – 11:15	“Small farmers in Vietnam under big context of European Union-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement and UK- Vietnam Free Trade Agreement” Ngo Thi Lan Phuong S-CODE: Center for Sustainable Community Development, Vietnam
	“Ensuring People’s Protection in Encountering Global Digital Rules Domination” Olisias Gultom Indonesia for Global Justice, Indonesia
11:15 – 11:25	Open Forum

Panel 6: The Role of Strong Social Investments in Economic Growth

A country's socio-cultural condition is intricately woven into its economy. Economic policies and conditions of a country can dictate the people's living conditions, enjoyment of social rights, and meaningful participation in a country's economic activities. Economic policies of most countries in the Asia Pacific, however, adhere to the neoliberal agenda especially on vital social services. Governments have relegated their role of providing social services to private entities and corporations whose primary interest is to profit. This leaves the majority of the people to wallow in poverty.

Even if states tout an increase in the GDP or GNP, these are just but abstract numbers to the people. In the concrete, there are no jobs or wages do not support cost of living. Access to water is diminished not only due to lack of infrastructure but more of its high cost due to privatization. The same goes for power, housing and telecommunications. Worse, privatization of education and health, make them inaccessible to most of the population and thereby, denying them of their basic rights.

Given that citizens are the economic backbone of any country, it is ironic that they are the ones that are at a disadvantage.

This panel aims to show how prioritizing government spending or investing in social services; providing job security; and increased wages will actually increase economic performance. On the other hand, the research in this panel explains how the neoliberal approach to social services such as cash transfers will have a negative effect on employment (Ahn & Kim, 2015).

Ahn, S-H. & Kim, S-W. (2015). Social investment, social service and the economic performance of welfare states. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 24, 109- 119.

11:25 – 11:27	Video: social and economic plan
11:27	Research Presentation

	“Vadhvan Port and Indigenous Peoples Rights” Renuka Kad Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, India)
	Open Forum
	Panel 5 and 6 Summing Up

Afternoon Session

1:45 – 2:00	Preliminaries
2:00 – 2:20	<p>Workshop 3: On Trade and Foreign Policy and the Social and Economic Plan</p> <p>Moderator: Aaron Ceradoy Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the current or negotiated free trade agreements and their impact or implications on trade and foreign policy and social and the social and economic plan; Identify emergent research issues on the workshop themes that can be areas of cooperation and collaboration; and, Bring to the fore policies on trade and foreign policy and the social and economic plan that would contribute towards a pro-people economy and trade agenda.
3:20 – 3:15	Report Back
3:50– 4:00	Synthesis and Conclusion of Day 4

Day 5

January 29

Morning Session

9:45 – 10:05	<p>Preliminaries</p> <p>Welcome Message</p> <p>Lee Jann Philippe S. Abes APRN Secretariat</p>
10:05 – 10:35	<p>Plenary</p> <p>Genuine Agrarian Reform</p> <p>Environmental Protection</p> <p>National Industrialization</p> <p>Monetary and Fiscal Policies</p> <p>Trade and Foreign Policy</p> <p>Social and Economic Plan</p>
10:35 – 10:45	<p>Synthesis and Recommendations: Towards a Pro-People Economic and Trade Agenda</p>
10:45-10:50	<p>Conference Statement</p> <p>Beverly Longid International Indigenous People’s Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation</p>