

# THE 13<sup>th</sup> ISTR ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE

*Civil Society's Role in Sustainability: Social, Economic Development, and the Environment*



April 23 to 25, 2025

PhD Seminar April 22-23, 2025

Cebu City, Philippines

The Center for Leadership, Citizenship and Democracy (CLCD) of the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG) at the University of the Philippines Diliman hosted the 13th ISTR Asia-Pacific Regional Conference from April 23 to 25, 2025 in Cebu City, Philippines. The University of the Philippines Cebu generously shared its campus as conference venue and its personnel and students from the College of Social Sciences, especially its Political Science Program, to support the event.

The conference brought together over 125 participants from 20 countries — scholars, practitioners, and leaders — committed to research that would advance the third sector's contribution to sustainable development. More than 80 papers were presented in total, including 5 panels, and one roundtable. The call for papers made special efforts to engage independent researchers and civil society organization leaders in order to encourage academic and practitioner discussion. To this end, submitters had the option to provide a statement on the implications of their research for practice and most submissions did provide this. The conference featured an impressive mix of government, civil society, academic, and corporate participants.

The full call for papers is [available here](#). The detailed program is [available here](#).



## CONFERENCE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

We are grateful to Dipendra KC, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University and Elaine Chan, Centre for Civil Society and Governance, University of Hong Kong for serving as academic co-chairs and to the members of the academic committee for their support in reviewing the submissions.

- Japan/Nepal (Co-Chair): Dipendra KC, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University
- Hong Kong: Elaine Chan (Co-Chair) Centre for Civil Society and Governance, University of Hong Kong
- Hong Kong: Hui Li, University of Hong Kong
- India: Swati Shresth, Centre for Asian Philanthropy India
- Indonesia: Maria Ridyati, Institute for Sustainability and Agility - PT Cendekia ECT, Jakarta
- Japan: Eliya Onoe, Nihon University
- Malaysia: Janice L H Nga, University Malaysia Sabah
- Philippines: Erwin A. Alampay, NCPAG, University of the Philippines
- South Korea: Young Ju Lee, The Beautiful Foundation
- Singapore: Peihan Yu, National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre
- Taiwan: Min-Hsiu Chieng, National Chengchi University
- Thailand: Piyasuda Pangsapa, Thammasat University, Thailand

## KEYNOTE SPEECHES

**Minako Sakai**, Deputy Head of School, Associate Professor, Southeast Asian Social Inquiry, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Canberra, Australia. Her keynote address, entitled *“Fostering Social Enterprises in the Global South: Identifying Drivers and Socio-Political Contexts,”* investigated the evolving socio-economic environments that motivate philanthropic organisations to pursue alternative income sources. It explored diverse policies and contexts for the development of social enterprises, with a particular emphasis on the Global South. Second, it highlighted the role of faith-based

organisations (FBOs) that drive initiatives to transform religious philanthropy into venture philanthropy, with a particular emphasis on Islamic Indonesia. It also examined how religious ideas shape and motivate resources to support initiatives to foster social enterprises. Government regulations, social contexts, and religious concepts intersect to foster innovation. Reflecting those religions are thriving in the Asia-Pacific, this address expanded the research agenda established by the 15th ISTR conference in Montreal to emphasise FBOs within the context of civil society research. See Dr. Sakai’s [abstract](#).



Faina Diola, Conference Host, ISTR Board Member, Minako Sakai, Keynote, Megan Haddock, ISTR, Aya Okada, ISTR Board Member, and Erwin Alampay, UP NCPAG



*Fengshi Wu, ISTR Board, President Angelo Jimenez, University of the Philippines, Leonor Magtolis Briones, Dean Kristoffer Berse, NCPAG, UP Diliman*

**Leonor Briones**, Secretary of Education under the Duterte administration, Professor Emeritus of Public Administration at the National College of Public Administration & Governance (NCPAG) of the University of the Philippines Diliman, was Vice-President for Administration and Finance of the University of the Philippines System, was Secretary to the Commission on Audit, served as Treasurer of the Philippines, and was chairman of the board of trustees of Silliman University in Dumaguete. She is the co-convenor of [Social Watch Philippines](#), an international network of citizens' organizations in the struggle to

eradicate poverty and the causes of poverty, to end all forms of discrimination and racism, to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and the realization of human rights. Professor Briones is a former Presidential Adviser for Social Development under President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, with the rank of department secretary and was National Treasurer of the Philippines.

In her keynote, Professor Briones talked about her diverse and rich experiences being part of CSOs, in the government, and in the academe. She shared experiences and reflections on some of the challenges CSOs face, as well as efforts of CSOs to address these challenges—particularly in Asia-Pacific countries, where she has worked in the past. She touched on key issues such as poverty alleviation, government accountability, the global debt crisis, the environment, and public finance. In the Philippines, she cited the EDSA People Power and post-People Power Movement as examples, highlighting a critical point that while CSOs often return to their specific advocacies after achieving victories, it is worth considering whether they should participate in government to sustain the reforms they fought for. She also said that CSOs have always addressed the spiritual and humanistic aspects of society and promoted government accountability. At the end of the day, she argued that political action is needed to translate the valuable research and advocacy efforts of CSO groups. Many CSOs are recognized for being vocal, yet much of their work is actually rooted in research. There should be recognition not only of efforts on global change, but also how civil society and the third sector organizations themselves are evolving.

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We are grateful to ISTR Board member Maria Faina Diola, UP NCPAG Professor, for serving as Conference Secretary-General, CLCD Director Charlie Cabotaje for serving as Conference Organizing Committee Deputy Chair, and CLCD University Researcher Melissa Digo for serving as Conference Coordinator.

We are grateful to the University of the Philippines Cebu for serving as the local focal point for planning at the venue and coordination with local government partners. In particular: Zenaida D. Ligan, Asst. Professor and Coordinator in the Political Science and Public Affairs Programs, and Aurelio Vilbar, Director, UP Cebu Ugnayan ng Pahinungod (UP Cebu's volunteer program).

ISTR's conferences provide important opportunities for the local host to collaborate with local partners. The UP NCPAG were successful in engaging a number of diverse partners:

**Academic - University of the Philippines:** UP President Angelo Jimenez, UP Diliman Chancellor Edgardo Vistan II, and NCPAG Dean Kristoffer Berse attended the conference and provided comments in person, and UP Cebu Chancellor Leo Malagar provided a video message. The conference provided an important opportunity for the two campuses, which operate independently, to build a closer relationship. Academics from other Philippine universities also participated in the conference.

**Government:** The Governor of the Province of Cebu hosted the conference participants for an opening gala dinner and dazzling cultural show at the Provincial Capitol building. The recording of the entire event is [available here](#).

Cebu City Mayor Raymond Alvin Garcia sponsored the second dinner and provided the buses for the Days 1 & 2 night activities transporting the delegation to the Provincial Capitol and for the Museum Tour and dinner.

**Foundation:** The Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI) hosted the conference participants for a tour showing the Kabilin Center and the Casa Gorordo Museum (house built in the 1800s and the home of the Gorordo family; acquired by RAFI in 1980 to open as a museum for the public). RAFI emphasized to the participants the importance of culture to development.

**Corporate:** Aboitiz Foods provided conference support and participated in a panel sharing their perspective on the role of the private sector in supporting civil society in the Philippines. Qualfon provided the snacks to the participants during registration.

**Civil society leaders:** Representatives of Philippine civil society organizations participated in the conference, including Executive Director and Director of Research of CODE NGO, the largest alliance of civil society networks in the country. They participated in a panel sharing their perspective on current issues facing civil society in the Philippines.



*Sandino Soliman, Executive Director, CODE NGO*

## RECORDINGS & PHOTOS

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**Recordings of the plenary events are available:**

Day 1: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Jev6iQ17n/>

Day 2: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16V6fYh2Xg/>

Day 3: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1HCB8y7gsr/>

**Photos of the plenary, parallel sessions, and other conference activities, as well as the conference cultural events are available at the CLCD page ( <https://www.facebook.com/clcd.upd> ):**

Day 1 photos: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1209611657623435&type=3>

Day 2 photos: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1209732567611344&type=3>

Day 3 photos: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1209836710934263&type=3>



*Charlie Cabotaje, NCPAG, Chancellor Edgardo Vistan II, UP Diliman, Megan Haddock, ISTR, Aya Okada, ISTR Board Member, and Faina Diola, Conference Host, ISTR Board Member*

## ISTR ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL PHD SEMINAR

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The Asia Pacific Regional PhD Seminar was held in advance of the 13th ISTR Asia-Pacific Regional Conference. Fifteen PhD students from seven countries participated; Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States. The PhD Seminar was chaired by Hui Li, University of Hong Kong. Dipendra KC, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, and Erwin Alampay, NCPAG, University of the Philippines joined as distinguished faculty.

Over a day and a half, the three faculty members facilitated discussions among PhD students related to the intellectual and methodological development of their dissertations and publication and career strategies. The Seminar was fortunate to have two PhD Seminar Alumni, Shiqi Peng and Linda van der Wijk, who provided integral support and designed and facilitated a peer-led professional development session “Navigating the PhD Journey.”

On the first day PhD students received an introduction on the role of ISTR and the Third Sector research context. It was followed by Hui Li's professional development session "Publishing Non-Western Studies in English Speaking Journals" that taught students about the importance of finding their own unique research voice, including a broad theoretical analysis, and balancing the uniqueness of the research context with generalizability.



The Seminar then split into three small groups to have in-depth discussions about individual PhD dissertations where students received constructive feedback from peers and senior scholars. A new element was added to this part of the seminar; each presenter was assigned a peer discussant. The discussant served as an effective ice breaker and offered insightful comments, which encouraged active participation from the other students. We hope to make this a part of future seminars.

The late afternoon was dedicated to the professional development session - Navigating the PhD Journey. It was a unique peer-led session in a word café style. One participant noted that this was a very nurturing experience as the PhD journey can sometimes be lonely. The next morning the Seminar took a field trip to a local NGO, the Community Empowerment and Resource Network (CERNET), to learn about its collaborative work with other NGOs in Cebu. The focus of CERNET's work is supporting farmers and disadvantaged people and the organization faces great challenges in the local context. It was especially useful for those who study the restriction of civil society space in different parts of the world.



The Seminar ended with a three-minute thesis competition. Alya Sutrisno from University of New South Wales in Australia won the competition with her dissertation "Environmental Justice and Energy Transition in Sumatra, Indonesia". She presented the pitch once again on the last day of the main conference.

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## Thanks to Our Sponsors

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Cebu Provincial Government, headed by Governor Gwendolyn Garcia**