

Report on the 6th TU-RIPS Seminar on “The Pandemic, Food Security, and Youth Rights” held on December 9th, 2022

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Abstract

The 6th TU-RIPS (Research Institute for Policy Studies, Tsuda University) Seminar on “The Pandemic, Food Security, and Youth Rights” was held on December 9th, 2022 as a hybrid event at Sendagaya Campus, Tsuda University. This year’s theme of TU-RIPS seminars is “Human Rights and Society” and this seminar is the fourth seminar of this theme. Two speakers from the Philippines, Dr. Maria Kristina G. Alinsunurin and Dr. Rhea L. Gumasing, from the Institute for Governance and Rural Development, College of Public Affairs and Development, the University of the Philippines, Los Baños, were invited to give lectures regarding food security, food distribution justice, youth rights, and youth political participation. After two lectures, we had a discussion on the relationship of food distributive justice with socio-ecological justice, and youth political participation in the Philippines and Japan. Dr. Naoko Shinkai, Director at Research Institute for Policy Studies, Tsuda University, served as a facilitator.

The 6th TU-RIPS seminar on “The Pandemic, Food Security, and Youth Rights” was held on December 9th, 2022, in a hybrid format, at Sendagaya Campus, Tsuda University. TU-RIPS seminars of 2022 have a common theme of “Human Rights and Society” and this is the fourth seminar of this theme. The first seminar was on human rights and international law, the second one on human rights and migrants, the third one on business and human rights, and the fourth one on basic human needs and youth rights. Our first three seminars were held with speakers of their relevant fields of study, such as international law, sociology, and business administration and economics. This time, topics related to basic human needs and youth rights were presented and discussed in rather inter-disciplinary ways. Aspects of public administration, development economics, rural development, and sociology were accommodated to tackle the issues. In the first two seminars, we discussed issues in Japan, whereas in the third and fourth ones, we focused on situations in developing countries to expand the scope of knowledge.

Two professors from the University of the Philippines, Los Baños, were invited as guest speakers,

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Dr. Maria Kristina G. Alinsunurin, Assistant Professor, Institute for Governance and Rural Development, College of Public Affairs and Development, the University of the Philippines, Los Baños, and Dr. Rhea L. Gumasing, Associate Professor, Institute for Governance and Rural Development, College of Public Affairs and Development, the University of the Philippines, Los Baños.

First, Dr. Alinsunurin gave a lecture on “Community Pantries and the Distributive Justice: Rethinking Approaches to Governing Welfare in the times of Crisis”. She, first, presented the societal issues and various social and economic conditions brought by COVID-19 in the Philippines, then, illuminated the problem of food insecurity, which was revealed in a possible system and coordination failure of food distribution. Food shortage is experienced in one area, whereas food waste is evident in other areas. In the Philippines, the level of food insecurity had been already high before the pandemic and its seriousness has been aggravated during the pandemic. She stressed the importance of food distributive justice and community solidarity to eradicate this contradicting circumstances. Food assistance from the government did not meet the needs of people and civil society instead provided food by community delivery system, such as community pantries, which was installed locally. She described how people in the Philippines had overcome food insecurity in the communities and the circle of mutual help and cooperation had been grown through these food distribution activities. It was stated that community solidarity was reinforced in two different forms; complementary movements to the government support and independent schemes. She concluded that this pandemic disclosed critical food insecurity but gave an opportunity for us to reconsider justice and human rights across time and space.

Next, Dr. Gumasing took a role of a discussant and gave her comments on Dr. Alinsunurin’s presentation. She summarized the presentation by Dr. Alinsunurin and emphasized that the role of community pantries would not be to replace or supplement public support or respond to the citizen’s needs for a long time. She also added that community pantries in the Philippines made us understand the rights and welfare of citizens and the roles of and conflicts among public, private, and civic institutions. She concluded by mentioning a possible function of community pantries, which is to provide necessary services by multiple institutions for social protection in a collaborative manner.

After having delivered her comments, Dr. Gumasing made a presentation regarding her on-going research project about “Inspiring Change: Japan’s Youth Civic Engagement”, funded by Sumitomo Foundation. In Japan, the voting age was changed from 20 to 18 years old six years ago. She investigated how much this change in the law influenced civic engagement of young adults in Japan. She conducted surveys virtually by distributing web-based questionnaires mainly to university students in the areas of studies, Kansai, and Kanto areas, in Japan. Questionnaires had three parts; social cohesion, social or community engagement, and motivation to act or behave in a certain way. Among valid responses of 138, most of them were females and most respondents were university

students. According to the results, half of them seemed to be discouraged to take actions for improving the community, where they belonged, and about 36% of them somewhat agreed and about 33% of them somewhat disagreed that during economic downturns, it is better for the government not to intervene. In terms of political participation, most of the respondents did not participate in the past 12 months but about 25% participated in volunteer activities for environmental protection. She concluded with her opinion about the reason for the youth to engage or not to engage in civic activities, and suggested some possible ways to motivate the youth.

After those two lectures, questions were addressed to two presenters.

The question addressed to Dr. Alinsunurin was about the relationship between food justice and socio-ecological justice. Dr. Alinsunurin replied by saying that there was food imbalance across and within countries and the pressure, which the process of food production gave to the soil, could accelerate the imbalance. She stated that, for the sustainability of the society, both food justice and socio-ecological justice would be important.

The question addressed to Dr. Gumasing was about the similarities and differences in the political participation of the youth in the Philippines and in Japan. Dr. Gumasing replied by saying that there were some similarities but the youth in the Philippines tended to participate more in political movements. She also mentioned that this difference probably emerged from the differences in education system and cultural environment.

Dr. Naoko Shinkai, Director at the Research Institute for Policy Studies, Tsuda University served as the facilitator.

Both domestic and international participants registered for the seminar and about 20 people participated in person.

Some photos taken at Sendagaya Campus, Tsuda University on the day of event



Dr. Alinsunurin



Dr. Gumasing



Dr. Alinsunurin and participants in the lecture room



From left to right are Dr. Alinsunurin, Dr. Shinkai, Dr. Gumasing, and Dr. Carada. Permission granted for the use in this report.