

SECRA Metro Manila Meeting: Charting Work Package Progress and Deepening Partnerships for Resilience

The European Commission-funded project Strengthening University Enterprise Collaboration for Resilient Communities in Asia (SECRA) convened for a week-long project meeting in Metro Manila, Philippines from the 13th to 17th of November 2023. This is the fifth project meeting since 2021. This event gathered consortium members from higher education institutions (HEIs) in Estonia, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the Philippines in one venue to discuss enhancing collaborations among the academe, enterprises, governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders to strengthen resilience against disasters and achieve sustainability. The meeting was organized by the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), Mapúa Malayan Colleges Laguna (MMCL), and the Philippine Normal University Manila (PNU).



Figure 1 The SECRA Consortium with the heads of Philippine partner HEIs, keynote speakers, resource persons for Day 1, and students from Philippine HEIs.

The first day of the SECRA Metro Manila Meeting kicked off with an opening ceremony and keynote talks. The heads of the three Philippine HEIs, Fr. Roberto Yap, President of ADMU, Engr. Anthony Hilmer Medrano, the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of MMCL, and Dr. Bert J. Tuga, President of PNU, gave their welcoming remarks, which was followed by a cultural show rendered by the PNU Rondalla and the KISLAP Dance Troupe. The cultural show featured a Philippine folk song medley and folk dances. To officially open the project meeting, Dr. Jörgen Sparf, on behalf of his co-SECRA Project Coordinator Dr. Evangelia Petridou, both of the Risk and Crisis Research Centre, Mid Sweden University, gave the opening

remarks, highlighting the five substantive work packages of SECRA.



Figure 2 Dr. Jörgen Sparf, one of the SECRA Project Coordinators, delivering the opening remarks

The morning session featured two keynote talks about the landscape and experience of university-enterprise collaborations (UECs) from the perspective of the public and private sectors. The speakers shared about their different visions and experiences in partnerships with other sectors to pursue sustainability and resilience of the community against disasters. The keynote talks were moderated by Mr. Steve Chavez, Head of the Ideation Support Group at the Ateneo Intellectual Property Office. The first speaker was Engr. Romelen T. Tresvalles, Regional Director of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in the National Capital Region. She shared about the initiatives and programs of DOST toward DRRM, including innovation and technologies that enable communities to prepare for disasters, leveraging on the collaborations among the industry, government, civil society, and the academe. The second speaker was Mr. Rene S. Meily. He is the President of Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), a private sector disaster management organization that includes major business groups. He talked about PDRF's approach at mobilizing the private sector for disaster preparedness and response, leveraging on the resources and equipment of the private companies to deliver relief goods and provide assistance to affected communities.

The afternoon session consisted of a panel discussion focused on local resilience, along with a workshop centered on the psychology of resilience, both organized by MMCL. The panel was moderated by Dr. Roel C. Rodrigo, Director of the Institute for Excellence in Continuing Education and

Lifelong Learning at MMCL and was composed of representatives from the academe, the industry, and the government. Prof. Emma E. Porio from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, Ateneo de Manila University, and Science Research Fellow, Manila Observatory, was invited to share about the perspective of the academe on climate and disaster resilience. The perspective coming from the government was provided by Dr. Likha G. Minimo, Director for Knowledge Sharing at the UP Resilience Institute. The perspective of the industry was provided by Arch. Alvin Tejada, a Project Management Professional, and an Accredited Professional for LEED, WELL, EDGE, TRUE and GREEN Building Standards, who is actively involved in sustainable building and climate mitigation causes.

The last program agenda for the first day was the Workshop on the Psychology of Resilience, which was delivered by Ms. Mahjalin Araiza B. Diez, chair of the Psychology Department of MMCL. The participants were enjoined to reflect and share about the 4S of Resilience: the Supportive People, Strategies, Sagacity, and Solution Seeking Behaviors. The participants were divided into groups and shared about their personal resilience plan and the common themes across the insights coming out from reflecting on the 4S of Resilience.

The day culminated with a presentation by Prof. Irene Lill, Head of the Building Lifecycle Research Group at Tallinn University of Technology, focusing on Work Package 7 (WP7). She highlighted insights derived from previous events and underscored the importance of evaluation and communication of feedback to enhance the execution of project activities.



Figure 3 Members of the consortium during the workshop on the psychology of resilience

The recording of the first day is available [here](#). The same-day-edit (SDE) video may be viewed [here](#) and photos accessed [here](#).

After a full and dynamic first day that set the tone for the event, **the second day** of the SECRA Metro Manila Meeting

opened with a Policy Dialogue with representatives from Philippine government offices and the NGO sector. The Policy Dialogue served as a platform for presenting the Policy Brief crafted by Philippine partners, centered on the initial findings of the SECRA project. This session facilitated a dialogue with sector representatives to glean their perspectives on gaps, barriers, and enablers of UECs in enhancing resilience within the country.

Dr. Charlotte Kendra Gotangco Gonzales, Associate Professor and Director of the Ateneo Institute of Sustainability and Country Lead of the Philippines for the SECRA Project, presented the Policy Brief, which includes gaps and proposed interventions on four identified models of UECs in the country: Student Internship Model, Faculty Immersion Model, Research and Development Model, and Research and Extension Model. The dialogue proper was moderated by Ms. Maria Rhodora R. Austria, the Dean of the ET Yuchengco College of Business and SECRA Lead in MMCL, and Dr. Darryl Roy T. Montebon, Assistant Professor, Director of the Institute of Teaching and Learning and SECRA Lead in PNU.



Figure 4 Key sectoral representatives during the Philippine Policy Dialogue. From left to right: Mr. Efren Singin, Jr. from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Director Harry M. Barber from the Office of Civil Defense, Mr. Elvin Ivan Uy of the Philippine B

Key resource persons invited to give their perspective on the policy brief were Director Jose Harry M. Barber, the Officer-in-Charge of the Policy and Development and Planning Service Office of the Civil Defense Central Office; Mr. Elvin Ivan Uy, Executive Director of the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), the country's largest business-led NGO at the nexus of corporate citizenship, sustainable development, and poverty reduction; Mr. Reuel Ruiz, the Program Head of Startup QC Local Economic Investment and Promotions Office, Quezon City Government; Mr. Eugene Garcia, Education Program

Specialist II from the Office of Student Development Services of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Central Office; and Mr. Efren Singin Jr., Education Program Specialist II in the International Student Affairs Division System of OSDS CHED. The Policy Dialogue was streamed live via Facebook, recording of which may be accessed [here](#).

The rest of the day consisted of internal discussions on the Policy Briefs of the consortium members from Asia and updates and announcements on Work Package 6 (WP6) on dissemination and exploitation activities.

Dr. Montebon, on behalf of the Philippine partners, provided an update on their policy brief, outlining the initial feedback received from pertinent stakeholders gathered during roundtable discussions. Additionally, insights were shared regarding the subsequent steps undertaken to refine and enhance the policy brief based on the received feedback.

Dr. Pichaya Poonlarp, Associate Dean of the Agro-Industry Faculty, and Dr. Sorraya Khiewnavawongsa, Assistant Dean at Chiang Mai University, representing the Thailand partners, delivered updates on their policy dialogue. They detailed their process, which involved conducting interviews with key representatives from various sectors such as in the Federation of Thai Industries, small and medium enterprises, the stock exchange of Thailand, provincial and district coordination committees, and university council members. Furthermore, they presented findings from the interviews and the proposed initiatives to address identified problems.



Figure 5 Dr. Sorraya Khiewnavawongsa of Chiang Mai University presenting the Policy Brief and Dialogue on behalf of Thailand partners.

Representing the Sri Lanka partners, Prof. Rukmal Weerasinghe, from the Department of Entrepreneurship at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, provided an overview of their policy brief and dialogue. He elaborated on the Sri Lankan context and the process of crafting and refining

their policy brief, which included workshops in Colombo and during the project meeting in Naresuan, peer review process, and translation to Sinhala and Tamil languages. Prof. Weerasinghe also outlined the ten policy recommendations formulated for UEC aimed at fostering economic recovery and resilience in Sri Lanka. Additionally, he delineated the forthcoming strategies involving continued policy dialogues to further advance these initiatives.

Following Prof. Weerasinghe's presentation, Prof. Roshan Dharshana Yapa, Director of the Business Linkage Innovation and Technology Transfer Office (BLII-TTO) at the University of Peradeniya, shed light on the pivotal role and advancements of University Business Linkages (UBLs) in Sri Lanka, spotlighting BLII-TTO as a case study. He recounted a success story illustrating how UBLs effectively addressed resilience during the pandemic. Additionally, Prof. Yapa highlighted potential avenues for UBLs to tackle the financial crisis in Sri Lanka, emphasizing the establishment of collaborative research laboratories bridging academia and the private sector, among other significant opportunities.

After Prof. Yapa's presentation, Mr. Thisara Uduwarage, a PhD Researcher affiliated with the Global Disaster Resilience Centre at the University of Huddersfield, took the floor to provide updates and announcements related to WP6. He discussed the progress of quarterly newsletters and press releases, highlighting the strategic plans to effectively expand the project's reach to a broader audience. Mr. Uduwarage emphasized the crucial role of these communication initiatives in not only disseminating the project's outcomes but also in paving the way for applying these insights to enhance resilience across Asia.

Similar to the first day, the second day ended with a presentation by Prof. Lill on the feedback from the first day and allowed time for the participants to input their evaluation of the current day's activities.

The SDE video of the second day may be viewed [here](#) and [here](#) while photos may be viewed [here](#)

On the third day, the agenda consisted of work package (WP) updates and workshops, and a campus visit to the Ateneo de Manila University. The campus visit featured talks on UECs, student pitches, a sustainability walk, and art gallery tour.

Dr. Sarita Jane Robinson, Deputy Head of the School of Psychology and Computer Science at the University of Central Lancashire, delivered updates on Work Package 1 (WP1). She provided an overview and updates of the process and outcomes of WP1 and involved the consortium in a reflective exercise. Dr. Robinson encouraged each in a reflective exercise. Dr. Robinson encouraged each member

to reflect about the personal and professional impacts of SECRA on their lives. These reflections were written onto feedback airplanes, making for an engaging activity where participants flew their planes towards a designated target prize, fostering a friendly and participative atmosphere to start the day's activities.



Figure 6 Participants flying their feedback airplanes

After WP1, Work Package 2 (WP2) followed with a presentation by Dr. Kinkini Hemachandra, Lecturer in the Department of Management at the University of Huddersfield, and Mr. Thisara Uduwarage. Among the topics covered in this session were the relational framework developed based on the literature review on UECs with Asian partner countries and research on integrating multi-hazard tools for preparedness and disaster resilience.

Following the morning sessions, the consortium members traveled to the Ateneo de Manila University for a campus visit. The consortium gathered at the Ateneo Blue Nest, located in the Eduardo J. Aboitiz Sandbox Zone of the Areté, Ateneo de Manila University. The Blue Nest is a Technology Business Incubation (TBI) initiative supported by the Philippine Department of Science and Technology (DOST). The campus visit began with Welcoming Remarks by Dr. Filomeno Aguilar, Jr., Assistant Vice President for Research, Creative Work, and Innovation. This was followed by 15-minute flash talks by the implementing partners of the SECRA Project within ADMU: the Ateneo Institute of Sustainability (AIS), the Ateneo Research Institute of Science and Engineering (ARISE), the John Gokongwei School of Management (JGSOM), and the Ateneo Intellectual Property Office (AIPO). They were represented by Dr. Charlotte Kendra Gotangco Gonzales, Dr. Emilyn Q. Espiritu, Mr. Joselito Olpoc, and Dr. Proceso L. Fernandez, respectively.

The afternoon also featured a student pitching event, which was organized as a Start-up Lab under Work Package 4 (WP4). Implementing partners from ADMU partnered with the DECSC25 (Creative Thinking and Innovation Management) class of Ms. Paula Atun, Instructor at the

Department of Quantitative Methods and Information Technology of JGSOM; students from partner HEI Mapúa Malayan Colleges Laguna (MMCL) also participated in the event. Project leads Dr. Jörgen Sparf and Dr. Evangelia Petrido from Mid Sweden University, WP4 lead Dr. Sarita Jane Robinson and Dr. Andrew Carmichael from the University of Central Lancashire, and Engr. Benjamin Mirasol of AIPO served as the judges for the competition. A total of 26 students, organized into six groups, participated. Each of the six groups presented their pitches, which was followed by questions from the panel of judges. EcoEats, a group of students from ADMU, was announced as the champion, and Vitastrip, a group of students from MMCL, was announced as the first runner-up. Both groups won a 3-month incubation at AIPO, and the winning group won additional tokens from AIS and JGSOM.



Figure 7 One of the student groups that presenting their pitch of a sustainability-related product during the campus visit

The formal program closed and participants were directed to their respective Activity Hours, where some consortium members took a self-guided tour of the Ateneo Art Gallery at the Areté building, and some took a guided Sustainability Walk around some of the sustainability-related initiatives around ADMU. Dinner was prepared upon their return to the Blue Nest, with remarks by Dr. Genejane Adarlo and Dr. Roberto Martin Galang, OIC of the School of Science and Engineering and Dean of the John Gokongwei School of Management, respectively.

The SDE video of the third day may be viewed [here](#) and photos accessed [here](#).

Fourth Day - WP3 (word out), WP4 (word out), WP5 (word out), share about the Sri Lanka Meeting, Steering Committee Meeting

The fourth day of the Metro Manila Meeting began with a session for Work Package 3 (WP3), led by Dr. Evangelia

Petridou of Mid Sweden University and Dr. Chaminda Senarathna Bandara of the University of Peradeniya. Consortium members were divided into groups and encouraged to work with members from other HEIs and countries to discuss the sustainability of the SECRA Project beyond the project cycle. The session for WP4 discussed an overview of the requirements of the deliverables and information needed for reporting purposes, and was led by Dr. Sarita Jane Robinson and Dr. Andrew Paul Carmichael of the University of Central Lancashire. Dr. Charlotte Kendra Gotangco Gonzales of the Ateneo de Manila University and Ms. Aleesha Lad of the University of Central Lancashire also presented.



Figure 9 Participants during the Compass Tool group activity

afternoon, the consortium visited the National Museum of Natural History, and enjoyed a tour of Fort Santiago and the Manila Cathedral with the help of the Intramuros Administration. The evening culminated with dinner at Barbara's in Intramuros, marking the end of the Metro Manila Meeting. The SDE of the fifth day may be viewed [here](#) and photos accessed [here](#) and [here](#).



Figure 8 Participants during the WP5 group activity

Work Package 5 (WP5) followed lunch, which discussed the Compass Tool, and was led by Dr. Jörgen Sparf of Mid Sweden University and Prof. Lasith Gunawardena of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Consortium members were divided by HEI and discussed implementation plans; the Asian partner HEIs were clustered together so that each group would have one HEI from each of the three partner countries to foster collaborative dialogue and glean potential best practices and strategies.

Information on the succeeding Project Meeting in Sri Lanka was shared by Prof. Ranjith Dissanayake of the University of Peradeniya. The day was capped with a Steering Committee Meeting.

The SDE of the fourth day may be viewed [here](#) and photos accessed [here](#).

A whole-day excursion program marked the final day of the Metro Manila Meeting. It was organized by the PNU SECRA partners and commenced with a visit to colleagues at the University of the Philippines Resilience Institute, where the consortium listened to presentations and were toured around the institute's offices and facilities. A lunch program was then held at PNU, another of the host HEIs. In the



Figure 10 The SECRA Consortium at the Philippine Normal University



Figure 11 The SECRA Consortium on a tour at Fort Santiago, Intramuros

Article written by Michaela Serrano, Jean Jardeleza Mijares, and Daniel Ratilla Photos taken by Dennis Mendoza, Atalia Studios, and Philippine Normal University SDE videos by Almer Chris Ocampo, Leodegario II A. Sabas, and Seth Dela Paz

The SECRA Project, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura stands out, playing an instrumental role in spearheading entrepreneurial endeavors in Sri Lanka. With its unwavering commitment to nurturing entrepreneurial ecosystems, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, in collaboration with SECRA, has orchestrated a series of impactful initiatives aimed at empowering aspiring entrepreneurs and fostering innovation. Among these endeavors, two notable activities stand out as exemplars of the university's dedication to fostering entrepreneurial spirit and driving transformative change.

Nurturing Entrepreneurial Spirit: Highlights from the 'Business Planning 101' Workshop



Amidst the spirited celebrations of Global Entrepreneurship Week 2023, the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEFENI) and the Chamber of Small and Medium Enterprises joined hands to host an enlightening workshop titled 'Business Planning 101' on November 16th, 2023. This collaborative effort, supported by the SECRA project funded by the European Union, unfolded as part of the GEW2023 initiative in Sri Lanka, orchestrated by the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA).

The workshop's primary objective was clear: to furnish growing entrepreneurs with the vital skills requisite for crafting comprehensive business plans – the keystone of every prosperous venture. Spearheading this insightful session was Mr. Dhanuka Perera, Chairman of CEFENI and a distinguished lecturer at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. With his wealth of experience in startups and as the co-founder of Codexea, Mr. Perera emerged as a beacon of guidance, explaining effective strategies for structuring business plans. Participants were treated to a spectrum of topics, ranging from market analysis and competitive strategy to financial projections and funding avenues, in an interactive and engaging format.

The resounding success of the workshop underscores the unwavering commitment of CEFENI and the Chamber of Small and Medium Enterprises at USJ towards cultivating

and nurturing Sri Lanka's entrepreneurial ecosystem. It serves as a testament to the collaborative ethos driving the establishment of a sturdy platform for entrepreneurial triumphs – a vision resonating with the aspiration of fostering a dynamic and vibrant business community.

In essence, the 'Business Planning 101' workshop emerges as a pivotal milestone, igniting the flames of ambition and training aspiring entrepreneurs with the requisite arsenal to navigate the complex environment of entrepreneurship. It embodies the collective resolve to cultivate innovation and entrepreneurship, propelling Sri Lanka towards a future overflowing with promise and potential.

As we reflect on the enriching experiences shared during the workshop, let us extend our gratitude to all stakeholders for their unwavering support and participation in nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit.

Kickstarter - Entrepreneurial Weekend



The SECRA Project USJ supported the organizing of the “Kickstarter Entrepreneurial Weekend” from 1st to 3rd September 2023. Thi was organized by The Department of Information Technology, in partnership with the Students Association of IT, SquareHub Pvt. Ltd, and the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka,. This vibrant event was precisely designed to strengthen the entrepreneurial insight of students.

The installation ceremony, held at the prestigious Senate Boardroom, witnessed a confluence of honored guests, faculty members, and enthusiastic students. Notable figures such as Mr. Kanishka Weeramunda, CEO of

SquareHub Sri Lanka, and Mr. Rajive Silva, CEO of Azend Technologies, graced the occasion with their insightful perspectives on the pivotal role of entrepreneurship among Sri Lanka's undergraduate community.

The three day event enabled students to generate entrepreneurial ideas and pitch them to a panel of industry experts. The Kickstarter Entrepreneurial Weekend served as a testament to the transformative power of collaboration and collective effort in fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. As the echoes of this inspiring event vibrate throughout the university community, it stands as a shining example of how partnerships, supported by initiatives like SECRA, can pave the way for a brighter, more entrepreneurial future in Sri Lanka.

<https://mgt.sjp.ac.lk/itc/kickstarter-entrepreneurial-weekend/>

<https://mgt.sjp.ac.lk/ent/business-planning-101-a-step-by-step-workshop-for-aspiring-entrepreneurs/>

SECRA engagement day for budding entrepreneurs at ICSBE 2023 – The Kandy Conference

The University–Industry Engagement Day of the project SECRA was held at the Kandy Conference (ICSBE2023), at Earl's Regency Hotel, Kandy on 16th December 2023 with the participation of undergraduates and recent graduates having business ideas, and several entrepreneurs. University academics and students from the University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna, and university academics representing the University of Sri Jayewardenepura actively participated. This event was organized mainly by the University of Peradeniya to promote business start-ups with the collaboration of the Business Linkage, Innovation, Incubation, and Technology Transfer Office (BLII-TTO) of the University of Peradeniya.



Mr. Migara Amithodhana, Co-Founder and CEO MagicBit, Mr. Chamath Kandambi, Founder and CEO of 360 Labs, and Eng. Shiromal Fernando, from the Civil & Structural Engineering Consultants (Pvt) Limited were among the invited entrepreneurs. Prof. Nandasiri Weerasinghe and Prof. Guttilla Yugantha Jayasinghe from the University of Ruhuna chaired the session. Prof. Champa Madhumathi Navaratne from the University of Ruhuna and Prof. Lasith Gunawardena from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura graced the occasion. The session was coordinated by Prof. Ranjith Dissanayake, Prof. Roshan Dharshana Yapa (Director, BLII-TTO), Prof. Chaminda Bandara, and Ms. Sadeesha Senanayake (Research Assistant) of the University of Peradeniya.

