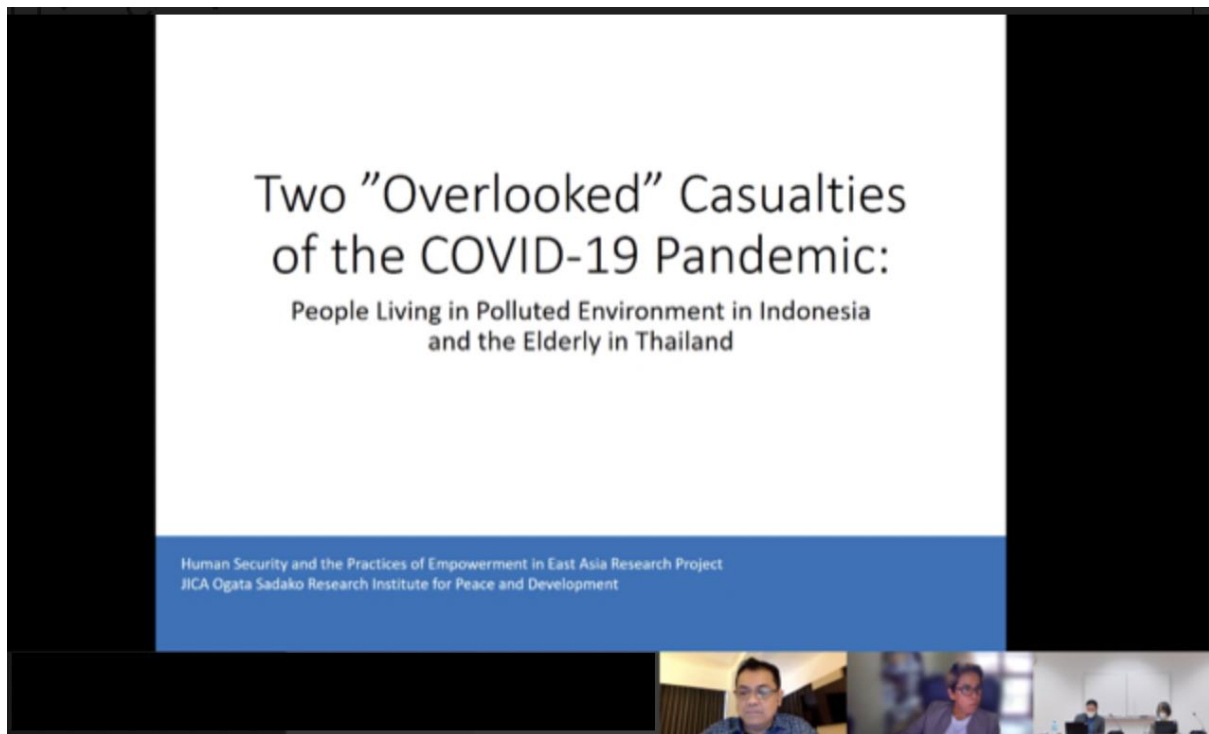


**[Cluster Seminar] “People Living in Polluted Environment and the Elderly: Two Overlooked Casualties of the COVID-19 Pandemic”**

June 7, 2022

The JICA Ogata Research Institute, Peacebuilding, and Humanitarian Support Cluster organized an online seminar entitled: “People Living in Polluted Environment and the Elderly: Two Overlooked Casualties of the COVID-19 Pandemic” on April 21, 2022. This seminar reflected on how the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted people’s insecurities and exposed vulnerable communities to diverse challenges. Two researchers from the “Human Security and Practices of Empowerment in East Asia Project” (hereafter the Empowerment Project), Dr. Arisman from the Center of Southeast Asian Studies (Indonesia) and Dr. Surangrut Jumnianpol from Chulalongkorn University (Thailand), presented on environmental issues in Indonesia and the aging society in Thailand, respectively. To complement these presentations, representatives from the JICA thematic departments, Mr. Koji Maeshima and Mr. Shintaro Nakamura, gave their comments and insights. The Empowerment Project’s Ms. Ako Muto and Dr. Lisette Robles welcomed the participants and moderated the seminar, respectively. This event was an opportunity to exchange expertise and experience on the two human security issues of environmental security and the aging population among scholars and development actors.



Introduction of the Cluster Seminar. (From Microsoft Teams, April 21, 2022)

Dr. Arisman shared that the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the plastic pollution in Indonesia. He elaborated on how increased personal protective equipment (PPE) like face masks and other medical wastes is a hygiene concern. Also, he discussed how the pandemic shifted the consumption pattern and behavior, and the implementation of a circular economy. While the health crisis has reduced traffic, it consequentially increased waste, especially plastic packaging and wrapping, as more people have their meals at home. He explained that the increased use of plastic for PPE posed more threats not only to the environment, such as increasing hazardous waste and rising air, but also to the health, social and economic well-being of the general public, especially to those who live near rivers as plastic can cause further water pollution.

Dr. Jumnianpol talked about the aging society in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic based on the survey she and her colleagues conducted last year. Although the Thai government was recognized as successful in controlling the spread of the virus in 2021, there were still difficulties for the Thai elderly during the pandemic. This includes reduced income and decreased family visits and communication, thereby worsening their life satisfaction and health conditions. She explained about governance on aging, such as laws and policies

prioritizing aging society and governmental bodies, including the Department of Older Persons under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. She emphasized the need to decentralize elderly management from state-centric to multi-stakeholder partnership and empower the local community as the intermediary to elderly empowerment.

After the presentations from the two researchers, representatives from the JICA's thematic departments gave their comments. Firstly, Mr. Maeshima introduced himself and their office, JICA Global Environment Department, which oversees environmental management, waste management, and water and air pollution control. He agreed with Dr. Arisman's presentation about the increased number of plastic waste and the necessity of a countermeasure from a human security perspective. He also shared three priority targets to approach this issue based on their experience: 1) formulating appropriate environmental policy; 2) strengthening the management system responding to environmental issues; 3) improving technology for adequate environmental management. Mr. Maeshima believes that JICA's waste management project will be shifted from focusing on waste management to creating a socio-economic system that does not produce waste, called a circular economy. Next, JICA Senior Advisor on Social Security, Mr. Nakamura, compared the context behind the impacts of COVID-19 on older adults in Thailand and Japan. While private sectors dominate Japan's health service provision, public sectors dominate it in Thailand, which might affect responses to the pandemic. He also said that the implications of Thai experiences with COVID-19 highlighted the importance of primary care in the community, among other things. Finally, Ms. Muto concluded this session by emphasizing the importance of the combination of protection and empowerment in Human Security and exploring obstacles to empowerment.

During the Q&A segment, Dr. Arisman highlighted the role of NGOs in responding to environmental impacts during the pandemic in Indonesia. He believes that programs conducted by local NGOs are hardly sustained, so it is essential to educate local leaders who can continue to educate local people. Dr. Jumnianpol shared more details of the health care systems in Thailand and stated that Thailand should learn how to decentralize the authority for the elderly.

In sum, the speakers found similarities and differences in the challenges of the health crisis by exchanging their knowledge from their research and experience. They agreed that

cooperation among state and non-state actors is necessary to approach human security issues. The seminar closed with Dr. Robles highlighting the need to reflect on the ongoing human insecurities and the immediate and continuous need to address these issues for future generations.



Speakers of the Cluster Seminar included researchers, JICA's thematic department representatives, and the JICA Ogata RI project team. (From Microsoft Teams, April 21, 2022)