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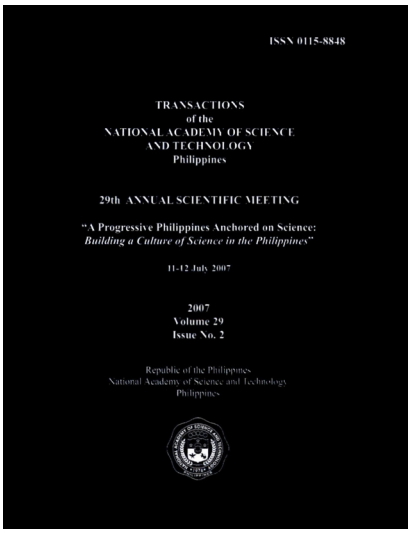

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An Interdisciplinary Working Life: Was It Worth Living?

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Very early in my working life came the realization that I am neither intellectually superior nor theoretically gifted. Being quite simple and rather ordinary, as a rural sociologist, I found my intellectual comfort zone in the precept that "Science must serve a human purpose". This has not made me a great sociologist, but at least, a different one, whose significant others are often beyond the discipline but always about everyday people. All these years my preoccupation has been with ordinary people and those whose science promises to make a difference in their lives.

Experience has shown that when research focuses on people's problems, interdisciplinary and participatory approaches to R&D become significant value-added to the process and the resulting product. This often means doing science from the ground up and then tapping into the most sophisticated tools and concepts of science to address the problem. In interdisciplinary and participatory R&D, people, places, purpose and particularities acquire greater clarity, specificity and interconnectedness. Every workshop with biophysical scientists becomes an occasion to look for the PEOPLE FACTOR, whether the subject is rice breeding, drought, natural resource management, trees, weeds, malaria, HIV-AIDS etc. There is always a human purpose behind each of these. For example, in breeding rice, the questions asked are usually: for what? for whom? for where? and for what purpose? These are all PEOPLE ISSUES which social scientists should seek answers to.

Science pursued as basic contributions to the body of knowledge of a particular discipline has well-defined pathways and channels of communication such as internationally refereed journals. Science pursued to address the problems of ordinary people still have ill-defined pathways and means of communication but when the research products fit into the complexities of real life, the impact on human well-being makes it all worthwhile. In a manner of speaking, "the proof of the pudding" is in

farmers' fields and in consumer acceptance; in human development.

To nurture a science culture in our society and not just in science and technology institutions, it will go a long way if all departments of government including Congress will have a Research and Evaluation Unit in order to develop research-based policies and programs. The values of science like intellectual honesty, objectivity, excellence, verifiability, validity, innovativeness, systematic procedures and evidence-based conclusions are values which the rest of society could imbibe. These values are the antitheses of what predominate in our country today. In science, one does not cheat because truth will sooner or later come out. But scientists must also acquire interdisciplinary perspectives in order to better address the human purpose of science.

My Working-Life-Years

In my own small way, I have always believed that "ideas matter; individual matter, and they can make a difference." This characterized what I call my interdisciplinary WORKING-LIFE-YEARS which came in nine identifiable periods — the human side of which I will share with you.

The First Period is the 40 years I spent with U.P. I was promoted four times. The first promotion was mandatory; the second was probably merit; the third, was based on a recommendation I had written myself. It must have been a good one for that was the biggest salary increase I have ever had. The rank of University Professor was a call from Diliman, not an initiative from UPLB. The University played a passive role in my working life by never interfering with my FREEDOM TO BE and my FREEDOM TO DO. This probably made up for the P18,000 salary of University Professor when I retired.

The Second Period –Rice was, and continues to be my preoccupation for 43 years. I found in rice, an international public good where science best serves its human purpose. IRRI and PhilRice keep me reminded about what is important in science. PhilRice informed me that for more than 20 years as member of the Board of Trustees, I have survived four Presidents and ten Department Secretaries. Why they kept me for more than 20 years is interesting. Being a media-shy person, I am probably regarded as harmless.

The Third Period consists of 38 years with international agricultural research centers where I learned about crops, trees, genetic resources, potato, sweet potato and most of all, that agricultural research is really about people even when the science focuses on commodities, genes, soil, water, and nutrients.

The Fourth Period of 12 years found me in international health research where leading bio-medical scientists including Nobel Laureates behave like ordinary mortals fighting the virus, parasites and scourges of humanity like HIV-AIDS, malaria, TB; etc. Their health research programs are characterized by an ethic of CARING for those who need care most. Science is their tool but CARING is their driving force.

The Fifth Period is the Evaluation and Review Years which total 43 from 1963 to 2007. There have been more than 42 occasions to participate in the reviews of R&D programs either as member or team leader. All of these programs promise to benefit those who have less in life but between Promise and Performance is a great distance. In terms of potential influence on policy and program, these evaluation years have probably had more impact than publications but the latter are necessary to be invited to be a team member in the first place. International professional reputation is valued and so is probity. Furthermore, an evaluator has to learn to listen not only to what is being said but to what is not being said.

The Sixth Period consists of 11 years in the Board of Governors of IDRC (International Development Research Center of Canada). IDRC was not afraid to take risks in opening up new research platforms in developing countries. They were never afraid to go where it was difficult, even in the middle of the Sohel. They had an Information Sciences Division before Bill Gates became a household name. Frankly, it was from my IDRC years that I came into interdisciplinary thinking and learned the meaning of internationality in humanity. These have contributed very much to a culture of "research without borders". After all, there is a common humanity.

The Seventh Period is 24 years as Academician and National Scientist. Few people realize that while it is a recognition, it is also a lifetime responsibility to society. As a matter of fact, one does not retire from it. As my grandchildren keep reminding me, I cannot do anything stupid or undignified because it is unbecoming to do so.

The Eighth Period is two years with the Ford Foundation as Program Officer for a Provincial-Level Rural Development Grants Program. These were two years of spontaneous unannounced ground-truthing about rural development. These experiences remain unmatched by other field-level exposures. Despite all these incomparable lessons, I chose to return to the University. With an IDRC Senior Research Fellowship, with my heart in my head, the book Beyond Manila was produced. I will never again be able to write something like that in a deeply personal way.

The Ninth Period is the "Gendered' Years which were three intensive years plus much work on women issues before GENDER became fashionable.

Some women leaders call me a Reluctant Feminist but development programs for women are not always labeled GENDER or WOMEN. For example, CARD-MRI (Center for Agriculture and Rural Development – Mutually Reinforcing Institutions) has a membership of more than 300,000 women but this micro-finance institution does not carry a GENDER label although it produces a GENDER IMPACT.

I have served as Board member since 1998 and have never missed a meeting. Despite all these, I do not expect to be acknowledged as a FEMINIST among feminists.

The Secrets in my Working-Life-Years

I am not a Super-Woman.

There are many things I cannot do. I can't drive. I can't type. I can't cook. I can't swim. I can't do IT. I can't be an administrator. I am not an organizer. I never want to be an expatriate. This is the only country I have and will remain so despite its major and minor imperfections. In 1950, I was diagnosed positive for PTB in both lungs. For this, I owe U.P. a month of stay in the Infirmary as the only patient during the summer. Dr. Priscilla Tablan of the Quezon Institute worked me through endless Xrays, lab tests etc. in order to pass the physical and medical examination required to obtain the visa for graduate studies in the U.S. When she saw me upon my return, her considered remark was: "You've got poise".

"Sa totoo lang" (truth to tell), I am an untitled social scientist whose most appreciated reward is a hybrid gumamela named: HIBISCUS GELIA CASTILLO, an officially registered flower. But most of all, I am one of the Diamond Girls of UP, a lifelong group of friends. Our ranks are thinning but the loyalty and friendship remain.

At this stage in my life, I've probably, done all my foreign travel with 56 countries stamped on my passports.

The message from these innumerable trips, national and international is: "neither a shopper nor a tourist be. Do justice to what you were invited for and MAKE a DIFFERENCE. The invitation letters come."

The Years Ahead

I never get engaged in any project or program unless I can be passionate about it. The three great passions in my life now are: RICE, Participatory Research and Development, and MICRO-FINANCE. The first is one of anticipation, of waiting for more rice research results which have been promised but not yet delivered. The second is an intellectual and empirical challenge which requires not only proof of concept but proof by impact. The third is exciting work-in-progress on how women manage to improve their lives even with micro inputs

invested with heart, mind, and social entrepreneurship.

What I am committed to is: more working years to the 216 already done. There have been more than 4 working-life-years for every year of my 53 chronological years as a working woman: How did I do it? I lived the years simultaneously.

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