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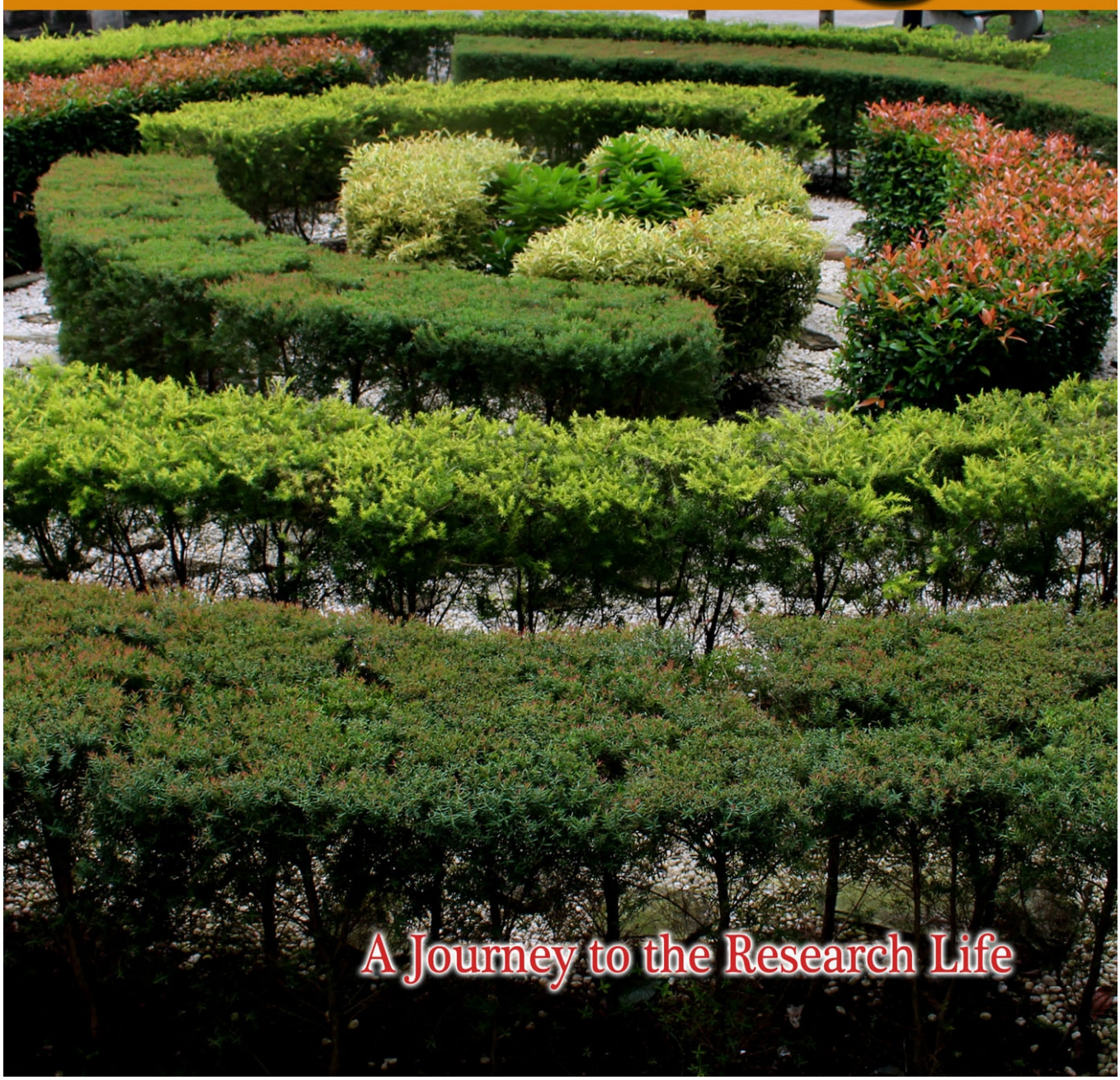

A Journey to the Research Life

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The journey of a social science researcher can be likened to a labyrinth--a complex, exciting maze, navigated through trial-and-error, but with a clear start and ending. This second issue of SDRC's *Talking Points* is all about the journey to the research life, from the points of view of different researchers at different stages of their journey through the labyrinth. Some have just started, some are in the middle of the journey, some are almost completing the journey, but definitely all of them are enjoying and learning from the maze of this so-called research life.

Prof.. Maeyet Lapeña shares her experience as an SDRC Fellow and how grateful she is beyond the research work. Prof. Lapeña prior to retirement was involved in several SDRC projects, taking on various roles, from lead investigator and project director to field researcher, proposal writer, and reviewer. She has made significant contributions to the Center. Meanwhile, Dr. Abdul Jhariel Osman, a young faculty member who recently finished his PhD, writes about a project describing the experiences of public secondary schools regarding out-of-school youth.

The third article is a reflection on how a young graduate student, Ms. Jessica Albaniel, took on big responsibilities as a Project Manager--the challenges she had to face and how she survived the project. She traversed the labyrinth the best she could until she found herself at its exit. To complete this issue of *Talking Points,* SDRC's first PhD apprentice Mr. Crisanto Regadio chronicles his experience as a young researcher who immersed himself in the Center's different projects. These researchers are just handful of the many social scientists one finds at DLSU-SDRC.

Hope we all learn from the sharing of these researchers as they journey through this exciting labyrinth that we call research.

MARIA CARIDAD H. TARROJA, PhD
Director, Social Development Research Center

Photo taken during field work in Pinabacdao and Daram, Western Samar, Leyte (February 2014).

GRATEFUL TO SDRC BEYOND THE RESEARCH WORK

Ma. Angeles Guanzon-Lapeña, M.A.
Retired Professor of Psychology
and SDRC Research Fellow

If I had not been asked to write something for the Social Development Research Center's *Talking Points*, I would not have realized that my work for SDRC has spanned more than a quarter of my life—16 years in all, so far, of scientific work on systems assessment, tracking efforts toward poverty alleviation, and institutionalizing quality assurance in the primary health sector. It was never a solo effort, but a collaboration among SDRC research fellows from various disciplines.

What flashes in my mind are images of people I've met over the years, people I would not have met had it not been for those SDRC research projects. Also, memories of situations I happily found myself in, experiences I had because of SDRC, and would not have had otherwise. So I decided to write about those people and experiences that are usually not included in the invariably prosaic progress and terminal research reports we wrote.

There are so many stories I want to tell you, stories behind each of my notes below:

The heroic Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) and Community Health Teams (CHTs):

> I remember clearly the words of one health worker: "*Sinabi na magbuo, pero sinabi na merong grasya wala; kami* willing *kami magdawat basta may mga* training, training *kasi sa amin trabaho namin yan. Di kami* after *sa* salary *na mayroon. Kung meron man, salamat.*"

The lack of transportation and meal allowance challenges the conduct of their duty as CHTs. They receive a minimal P500 allowance (US$ 10) per month as BHWs, but they don't receive extra allowance as CHTs. For this reason, they don't have enough resources to hire or ride a motorcycle to reach their clients. They have to walk from one community to another.

One participant in our study remarked, "*Sa amin as* volunteer *alam namin na trabaho, trabaho na walang pera. Kasi tumatanggap na rin kami ng* honorarium, *galing barangay lang ang amin.*"

Another added, "*Doon sa* municipal *wala kaming* honorarium *pero may* budget *naman kami sa mga* DSWD Education or *lahat.*"

To be able to encourage the mothers to go for prenatal check-up, CHTs sometimes provide them the money to pay for their transportation and the service fee.

According to the medical health officer (MHO) of Arakan, in some areas it will cost the midwife non-reimbursable P500 (US$ 10) for each barangay visit, which they get from their minimal P5,000 monthly allowance (US$ 100). Some midwives limit their visit to their barangays to once or twice a month, and for others it is not uncommon that they visit a barangay every two months or quarterly. The money they need to spend for their meals on each visit is not included. In addition, the performance of duties of the midwives is made more challenging by the distance and difficult roads, accessibility of transport, exposure to excessive heat and rain, vulnerability to security risk in conflict areas, and the actual number of the clients they need to handle at each visit.

Local beliefs about pregnancy that need to be verified for scientific basis:

The Muslims believe in the effectiveness of the *sundang*, an instrument that eases the pain of labor and that can only be touched by their traditional birth attendant (TBA). They allow the TBA to prepare the *sundang*, ask them to sanitize their hands and arms and wear medical masks, but they do not allow the TBA to assist during the delivery.

Some project respondents believe that *"Kapag buntis ka at nahawakan ka ng hilot, dapat siya ang magpaanak sayo."*

Before her delivery, one TBA prepared a string for sewing and folded it in equal lengths seven times and prepared seven equal slices of ginger.

Palina or a smoking ritual is performed in some communities before giving birth, for a smoother and less painful delivery.

Some communities believe that pregnant women should refrain from sitting on stairs or standing in the doorway, and also from washing clothes and soaking their body in water, to avoid harmful consequences.

Other mothers believe that over-exposure to the wind and going out at night will lead to constipation.

Suggestions for improved services at the health center, as made by:

Mothers:

A feeding program for pregnant women and post-partum mothers

Free meals for mothers and children

An increase in the supply of medicines and vitamins

The provision of soya milk to mothers

HSPs:

Support for midwives to attend tutorials on local dialects and on cultural orientation

Complete facilities, including a birthing unit

A more organized and extensive orientation program on pregnancy and immunization

The LGU:

The municipality aims to provide financial assistance to 1,000 families in the municipality to be able to pay the Philhealth Premium of P200 per month (US$ 4).

The eligibility of the identified families for Philhealth services and benefits will improve their access to basic health services as well as free delivery in a birthing facility. Philhealth insurance guarantees zero expenses in a public hospital, and considerable discounts in private medical institutions.

Other observations made regarding maternal health:

Procedures for testing for pregnancy include the use of pregnancy test kits, noting of missed menstrual periods, and going to a *hilot* for diagnosis.

There is increasing probability of women patronizing a health facility's services and giving birth in a health facility.

The support of effective maternal and neonatal health (MNH) performance in the areas involved includes the availability of a regular midwife.

Proximity of the barangays to the Poblacion is important, as is the good condition of roads, and an LGU that is supportive of the MNH campaign of the RHU.

The reason cited for not immediately nursing a baby after birth is the mother's concern about the possible effect that the anaesthetic injected into her will have on the baby.

Prenatal check-ups cost P120 (US$ 2.15) in a one-time payment, with a service fee of P35 per visit (US$ .70), while immunization costs P125 (US$ 2.20).

Some clients are too poor to afford the prescribed skilled birth attendant delivery.

The perception of poverty is not being able to eat three times a day, and not having enough transportation money to go to the Health Center for regular check-ups.

PHILHEALTH benefits need to be fully explained.

Those who comply with the prenatal services requirements are beneficiaries of 4Ps because they are afraid of incurring deductions from their monthly benefits.

There is decreasing probability of giving birth in a health facility.

Pregnant women need to cross two rivers and traverse steep terrain to reach the main road leading to Poblacion.

Important lessons learned from my research involvement in the primary health sector:

Do not make promises you cannot keep.

Own the Health Facility; after it has been donated, keep it as clean as you would your own home.

LGU officials should set aside money for supplies of medicine and for maintenance of the buildings housing the health centers.

LGUs should not expect the donor to take care of repairs of the infrastructure.

Always exert best efforts when dealing with the marginalized, e.g., the poorest of the poor, indigenous peoples (IPs).

Other images and experiences that I have strong memories of:

The inimitable skylab (an extended version of the single motorcycle transport)

The beleaguered medical health officer (MHO)

Underused PHILHEALTH benefits

The generous clinical support officers (CSOs) and international non-government organizations (INGOs) (such as the Zuellig Family Foundation (ZFF), Tzu Chi, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF))

The overworked human services personnel (HSPs)

The beauty of the wild terrain of our Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs)

Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and initiatives

The *Buntis* Congress

The *Libro ni Mommy ug ni Baby*
Halfway house

There are so many stories I could tell, but for now, let me tell you about my take-aways from 16 years of SDRC work—my gratitude journal of sorts.

Because of SDRC, my bond with sociologists and anthropologists from my earlier days with the Behavioral Sciences Department grew even stronger: with Dr. Exaltacion Lamberte, mentor-par-excellence, whose trust in her teammates' and assistants' work was truly awesome, such that we all sought not to disappoint her; with Dr. Jesusa Marco, whose personal stance on empowerment would find its way into the kinds of research she preferred to do, action researches with clear benefits for our informants' respective communities built in as research outcomes; with Prof. Cristina Rodriguez, tireless field researcher whose observant capacity was phenomenal; with Dr. Pilar Jimenez, Dr. Elena Javier, and Prof. Stella Go, whose insightful comments I would eagerly look forward to, each time we would be gathered for taking stock of where SDRC was and wanted to go; for Dr. Romeo Lee, who always walked the talk, taking full responsibility for our projects; for Dr. Myla Arcinas, who infused dynamism into every capacity-building session she would facilitate; and for Dr. Benito Teehankee, who taught me many features of various software I needed to use in my teaching and research.

Because of SDRC, I have had deep conversations with people I had to interview, people who I would not have met were it not for the research tasks I was assigned to do. These people were, to my mind, true heroes. People who gave of themselves freely, despite great sacrifices asked of them: The health workers in Baguio where our team went to visit almost weekly for two years, whose catchment areas were hilly and covered many kilometers they would have to travel on foot, and the health service provider in a province where the LGU ran out of money for her Php4000 monthly salary, who continued to go to work because her help was needed, or the farmer who built a house for his family on land given to him by his father, buying one hollow block at a time, and painstakingly cementing the blocks by himself so he and his wife and their four children could be sheltered from typhoons and floods that periodically came their way.

Because of SDRC, I learned to take different kinds of transportation to reach geographically isolated areas. I found myself on a *habal-habal*

with wind running through my hair as I held on tightly to the motorcycle driver, passing through very narrow mountain roads; on a *banca* riding rough waves with the mayor of the place where I was to gather data telling me the story of how she had to take on the duties of her husband, the previous mayor, after he was assassinated; and on a bus leaving Pasay at 10 o'clock in the evening, and arriving in Baguio at 4 o'clock in the morning, then going back to Manila on the same day by bus at 6 o'clock in the afternoon.

Because of SDRC, I now see the faces of people behind the statistics that are merely reported in local newspapers and broadsheets. For instance, when I recently saw in the news that the Philippines has a very high rate of teenage pregnancies, I remembered two teenage mothers I had interviewed, two girls who were as different as night and day. One came to the health facility with her mother in tow, the other came on her own. One was clearly very dependent on her mother's guidance, the other knew that childbirth would give her more responsibilities, and that she would need to start living her life on her own. Although both were only 14 years old, one was still a child in outlook, the other was an emerging adult.

Because of SDRC, I have long-lasting relationships with my research assistants, some of them even asking me to formally stand at their weddings as *ninang*, and the rest of them, married or not, being my *de facto* godchildren. Many of them were research assistants par excellence. Some of them have moved on to become researchers on their own merit, even publishing single-authored papers. Some have moved on to NGO work, being given and taking on leadership roles in their respective advocacies. I remember two of them who stood out among their peers. One would initiate work I had not yet even asked to be done. I recall that RA saying, “Ma'am, I prepared an outline of how we can organize the literature we're reviewing. Here it is.” In another instance, that RA said, “Ma'am, I thought it might help you to put our qualitative themes side by side; I call it *latag*,.” then proceeded to show me our themes on an Excel file printed out on in landscaped format for ease of reading. That RA was the same one who drafted a write-up of our data for our terminal report, a month before the writing of the report was time-tabled, anticipating data trends given the qualitative data we had to date at the time the draft was made. I had another research assistant who would call all his friends taking up masteral courses along with him to let them know of upcoming data-gathering needs for field researchers of our various SDRC

research projects. A database of those on-call field researchers enabled us to fulfill many target completion dates in our research projects' schedules. That was the same RA who would volunteer to go to far-flung places, eagerly soaking in field research experiences not just for the adventure of it, but also for the honing of skills that only research on the ground could give. That RA had a keen eye for possible operational snags, anticipating problems and suggesting effective solutions ahead of time. Like all my other RAs, that RA had extremely good interpersonal skills, always sensitive to the needs and wants of our field research respondents and all those who facilitated and helped us maximize our time at the site. Time and again, my RAs validated the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* nuggets of wisdom I had acquired in my early research days with my mentor Dr. Virgilio G. Enriquez.

Indeed, in retrospect, I owe so much to SDRC, for relationships and experiences I would not exchange for the world!

Photo taken during the SDRC Operations Manual Writeshop on August 5-6, 2016 at the Orchid Garden Suites, Manila. Prof. Lapeña was the activity's facilitator.

Dr. Maria Caridad H. Tarroja during the Data Validation (November 2016) for the "Understanding the Context of Lack of Interest among Out-of-School Youth" Project, funded by The Asia Foundation.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF LACK OF INTEREST AMONG OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH:

The Experiences of Public Secondary Schools

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Lack of interest is one of the top reasons why elementary and secondary students drop out of school. To a considerable extent, this project of the De La Salle University Social Development Research Center (DLSU-SDRC) may be viewed as a response to stop the growing number of cases of student dropout in the country. The purpose of this project is to understand the meaning of lack of interest among out-of-school youth (OSY). The project aims to determine the factors that contribute to students' lack of interest and analyze how the different senior high school specialized subjects of the K to 12 curriculum impact the student dropout, and then disseminate this information to government agencies that legislate and enforce education policy in the country.

With the support of the Asia Foundation (TAF), which shares with DLSU-SDRC a commitment to reducing the cases of student dropout through research, and analysis and implementation of government policy on education, this project led by Dr. Maria Caridad H. Tarroja, together with Dr. Abdul Jhariel M. Osman, and Ms. Klarizze Valdoria, has begun.

The research team highlights the gap in the conceptual understanding of the state of lack of interest, and takes into account people who can offer complementary information that emphasizes the quality of lack of interest. Being aware of the main concern of this project and its participants, the team has decided to follow a qualitative inquiry to obtain an in-depth and context sensitive description of lack of interest.

From the onset, this decision has been shared and discussed by the team with TAF and with other key participants in the academe and in the government. The team does this because it recognizes the strength of a sustained and extensive consultation.

Gauging the demand for this project, the research team has sought the comments of TAF and the support and buy-in of the Department of Education (DepEd). Their support and approval mark a significant stage in the development of this project.

In view of this, the research team has taken forward the implications of the ethics review procedure and comments of TAF, and integrated them in the project design and dissemination. In addition, the De La Salle University Code of Ethics and Guidelines for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the Child Protection Policy have been revisited and considered by the team. These ethical guidelines undergird the procedures the team has strictly observed in each phase of the project.

With a clear awareness of the ethical protocols and sensitivity to the social context of the participants, the team pilot tested its instrument with a comparable sample group in order to assess its appropriateness and cultural sensitivity. The results of the pilot test have been reviewed and used by the team as a basis for revising the instrument.

Through a letter, the research team coordinated with the principals of schools. However, a letter was not enough. Henceforth the team has visited the schools in person to build a healthy working relationship with the principals and teachers, and to orient them about the project in clear terms. A good set of soft skills or people skills plays an important role in this project. As a matter of fact, the openness and the ability of the team to listen with respect to the comments and questions of the target participants has shortened the time needed to build trust and a relationship with them and with other key stakeholders at the project site. Moreover, with the help of the teachers in those schools, the research team has been able to set the schedules for the interviews and focus group discussions with students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) and OSY, with school administrators, teachers, personnel, and parents, and with the community leaders and OSY in their respective barangays.

Defining “lack of interest” among OSY is the focus of this project; yet inasmuch as the team would want to offer a direct definition of the term, it has discovered that there is a dearth of conceptual understanding among the participants of its meaning. When they were asked to define lack of interest, the participants spoke only about student behaviors that indicate lack of interest. In view of this, the research team compared the interview transcripts with the reviewed literature, and examined empirical studies related to lack of interest in the school setting. This action led the team to the concept of “academic motivation,” which refers to “internal processes that instigate and sustain activities aimed at achieving specific academic goals.”

Low academic motivation or its absence can encumber students with having to comply with academic requirements, which may later lead to dropping out. After thoughtful deliberation and consultation, the team recommended replacing the term “lack of interest” with “low academic motivation” in this project.

Group photo taken during the Presentation of Results on December 9, 2016 with Br. Armin Luistro, FSC as special guest at the Orchid Garden Suites, Manila

Being that the research team has identified behavioral indicators of low academic motivation, which are displayed by students inside and outside the classroom, boredom in class and having no assignment or project to submit are the classroom behaviors that have been discovered from the data. A comparable number of responses in both research sites indicate that students with lack of interest were bored in class often, if not always. When they are bored, they doodle or draw, chat with their classmates, and use their phones during class hours. Likewise, the team recognizes that a habitual non-submission of assignments and projects among students is indicative of their low academic motivation.

Moreover, based on the extracts from the interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs), the research team discovered student behaviors outside the classroom that indicate low academic motivation. The most frequently reported behaviors are cutting classes and absenteeism. Cutting classes includes roaming around the school premises, leaving the campus to play computer games or billiards, and going to malls.

Thereupon, the team suggests that teachers and other concerned professionals directly working with students in class need to be alerted about the said classroom behaviors so that they can prevent the gradual increase of low academic motivation among their students. The team also suggests that teachers work with the larger community in addressing cases of students manifesting low academic motivation.

Overall, the increasing cases of student dropout due to low academic motivation require greater community involvement. They require transparent communication of policies and programs, and continuous school innovation and research. For this reason, DLSU-SDRC will continually lead research projects that ensure the attainment of humane, inclusive, just, and sustainable communities in which every person recognizes the value of education, and take action to stop the ecological and socio-economic factors that kill academic motivation and threaten the future of our students.

Photo taken during a Project Meeting at the Department of Health, Tayuman, Manila on August 19, 2015 for the project "How Universal Health Care is Closing the Gap in Health Outcome Disparities Among Local Government Units," funded by the European Union Delegation to the Philippines.

"How my first project shook me"

Jessica Anne S. Albaniel
Candidate for MS in Psychology,
Major in Clinical Psychology
SDRC Research Associate

The European Union.

The Department of Health. Universal health care. Public health. Project. Letters. Draft. Cheques. Tax affidavits. Email. Local Research Teams. Cash advances. Liquidation. Data coding. Data cleaning. Excel. STATA tables. Addendum. Signatures. Honorarium. Data management. Local government units. Interviews. FGDs. Final report. Research.

This was my vocabulary and reading material for an entire year.

I had just finished my comprehensive exams and practicum for graduate studies. I had been a full-time student for so long and resigned from a couple of jobs to prioritize my graduate school work. I was at the threshold of the purgatory one calls "thesis" and felt like I needed a change in my life. It's true, what they say about networking. The jobs you land will not come from your close circle of friends, but rather from what Dr. Meg Jay calls your "weak ties"—your extended network of friendly acquaintances. In my case, it was a classmate from grad school who told a former professor that I was looking for a University-based job. I got called for an interview and I soon learned that field research was colloquially called "projects."

I learned that the project I was being hired for was externally funded by the European Union Delegation to the Philippines. Years ago, health policies and systems were centralized, with the

Department of Health being the main house disseminating policies, regulations and budget allocations to local government units nationwide. At some point in previous decades, the system underwent devolution, implying a significant change in health systems and policies. Instead of the DOH being the central figure of authority, local government units were given the autonomy to develop their own health policies and programs. A budget was allocated to each of the local government units using a formula that would, ideally, divide the funds fairly among all the municipalities, cities, and provinces. Of course, this devolution brought about a significant change in universal health care, and our project's goal was to find out what the gaps were, given this reorganization.

We gathered data from 15 provinces, 60 municipalities, and 4 cities. We had a long list of stakeholders to gather data from, with distinct interview guides for each key informant. Our key informants mostly consisted of local government unit officials, like the mayor, the governor, the health officers, the hospital heads, and the hospital patients. It was logistically impossible for all members of the core team to go to each of the provinces for months. Instead, it was decided that we would recruit local researchers, people who fit certain academic and professional criteria, then deploy members of our own team to the data gathering sites in order to train these local researchers, and hire them to conduct the interviews and gather the data for us.

This was the first project I had ever handled. I took on the task with very little research experience: undergraduate and graduate coursework, transcribing, and encoding. Needless to say, I was eager for a new (and, what sounded to me as being an important) experience, but I was also very anxious with the notion that I would fail somehow. When I first started working for the EU project, there was no such thing as lag time. On my first day, I had to rush-create a document in the morning and was bombarded with emails from people I had never met. I was picking up things as I went along and multi-tasking in a way that I had never imagined possible. Multi-tasking became second nature to me, and what I once thought required five pairs of hands to do, I could do with one.

What classrooms fail to explain about research is that there is so much work that goes on beyond administering surveys and encoding data. The different designs of data gathering and analysis call for different procedures and strategies on how to perform them. Before we could even begin conducting interviews, we needed to engage locals in the provinces to join

our project and gather data for us. This required repeated negotiations, explanations, and correspondences. I juggled memorizing names, understanding different concerns, and engaging conversations with complete strangers all at the same time. The list of local research teams grew, and pretty soon I was communicating with 15 field supervisors, 15 public health experts, and 60 field researchers. Unfamiliar faces and names on paper. People whom I'd never met previously, and there I was telling them what to do.

It was tricky. We were transacting with many people whom we had never met personally and who were all scattered over the country. At the same time, we were restricted by University policies and processes. How should funds be requested for projects—as cash advances, or as petty cash? What do you do when a local researcher can't encash her honorarium cheque because the office that released her cheque in the first place released it as a crossed cheque? What happens when you lose a receipt during data gathering? What do you do when a faculty member who is deployed in the province to train local researchers calls you at 6:00 in the morning because she's stranded?

Meanwhile, in the field, key stakeholders would often reschedule their interviews. In one of our data gathering sites, a stakeholder blatantly told the interviewer that he did not have time for an interview and had other priorities. And who could blame him? At the time of data gathering, this municipality was experiencing an inter-tribal conflict with another municipality, during which the mayor and even health officers stepped in. The reality of fieldwork is that everything is working against you—local politics, Mother Nature, your own institution. You have to be ready to ride every wave, and not let yourself be consumed by it. As much as you would like to control everything and eliminate extraneous variables, sometimes you really can't. Sometimes a key informant will give really lousy responses to questions, no matter how much you probe. Sometimes a local researcher will yell at you over the phone, for something that wasn't your fault. Sometimes data can't be gathered, despite all efforts exerted to obtain it. Data gathering was like a baseball game, with one curveball being thrown right after another. It was like I was on a tightrope, and if I just held my breath and worked hard, I'd make it to the other side.

After months of calling, texting, emailing, and reminding, all local researchers submitted their data.

And then my co-research associate said, "Now our learning curve will be figuring out how to manage it."

Here's the thing with dealing with local researchers: We sent detailed emails with screenshots and arrows and examples. We explained how we wanted data formatted over the phone and through email, exhausting every way we could think of to make sure we were all on the same page. Yet somehow, not all data files were returned to us in the way we expected. Some did not follow the format and some made their own, entirely different format altogether. It was months of exchanging data files and repeatedly explaining what we needed from them. When dealing with local researchers, do everything you can to provide clear

instructions. But when the need calls for it, sometimes all you can do is work with what you have.

Cleaning data of this volume was like color coding a tangled ball of thread. I went through that data with a fine-toothed comb. I read about faulty government systems, insufficient budget allocations, and a lack of coherent training for the hospital staff. I would sift through narratives

and numbers from unknown faces and names on paper. Managing a dataset of this magnitude was beyond me, and eventually required a team of data management assistants. I had to train these people, supervise them, and manage their workloads. I went from being a lowly RA who worked with one other RA, to being thrust into a supervisory role and suddenly managing 10 people at a time. I spent hours staring at my computer screen, with my fingers rapidly typing and clicking, working as fast as I could.

After what seemed like endless data cleaning, we were finally able to generate analyzable quantitative and qualitative data. Our project director was able to write the final report and we welcomed the New Year with the satisfaction of knowing that we were almost at the finish line.

All of this work for a few pieces of paper.

Sarah Kay, my favorite spoken-word poet, tells a fable of a young girl who visits a construction site. She approaches the first workman she sees and says "Excuse me, what are you doing?" He says, "Can't you see? I'm laying brick." She approaches the second workman she sees and says, "Excuse me, what are you doing?" He says, "Can't you see? I'm building a wall." Finally, she approaches the third workman she sees and says, "Excuse me, what are you doing?" He says, "Can't you see? I'm building a temple."

Every day that I worked for that project, I was extremely busy, but at the same time, extremely grateful for the opportunity that I was being given. There were days when I felt like the first workman who was simply laying brick, just trying to get things done, placing things here and there, putting things together. Other days I felt like the second workman, tying myself to the project and its cause; to the purpose of applied research and the glory of academia. And then there were rare days, particularly after a long and exhausting week, when I felt as if I was building a temple. The time and energy I was devoting was for a cause much larger than the University. Much larger than myself. My energy was for a little girl in Kalinga, who couldn't get proper healthcare because the hospital didn't have the proper equipment. My time was for a deployed nurse in Surigao del Norte, who worked 24 hour shifts because the health center was understaffed. My service was for a tribe of the deceased, who were not able to attain proper health care because the health center didn't have an ambulance to transport them from the mountains down to the town proper.

This project was by far the most impactful character-building experience I have ever had. It pushed, pulled, shoved, kicked, and shook me into being better than I was when I first came in. I learned that I had a strong will, and in the right working environment, was a happy and productive workaholic. I learned things about myself I knew I would not have been able to learn otherwise, had I not been put in situations this job put me in. I never knew I could multi-task the way I had during data gathering. I never knew I could work in fast-paced environments without crumbling. I never knew I could communicate with literally dozens of people, strangers who I'd never met, simultaneously. I never knew I could find solutions and make compromises in seemingly slump situations; I never knew I could deal with unpleasant personalities, without letting them get to me. I never knew I could supervise people, coordinate with people, and be on top of things the way we trudged through data coding. I never knew that I would be productive enough to accomplish a to-do list that seemed like it would go on forever, in a matter of hours, days, weeks.

I learned that I could be proactive and find solutions to problems. I learned that I could work with people of various personalities--sometimes pleasant, sometimes high maintenance, sometimes people I could not stand. I learned that I could be more productive when I eliminated distractions. You would be surprised at the amount time that is wasted on Facebook and television.

But in many ways, serving as a research associate for this project was a test of character as much as it was a test of competency. I learned that I had more determination than I gave myself credit for. I learned that I had more grit than I thought possible, even in situations that would drive me to pull my hair out. I learned, after my co-RA left the project, that I could stand alone. I learned that I had more patience, faith, and forgiveness in myself than ever before. You will never truly know what you are capable of until your mind and heart have both been challenged by adversities.

I've been asked if I regret the time I spent in the EU project, if i regret the months I worked for a job that wouldn't give me stability and took time from thesis-writing. I will tell you this: Oftentimes, people would see me scrambling around the research center working between my desktop, my laptop, our administrative assistant, and the telephone. Every working day was filled with different challenges. I had never wished more in my entire life that days were longer than a mere 24 hours. Every day wasn't a bed of roses, but not once did I want to give up. I had been given several contract extensions, and

though I always asked for time to think about it, I knew in my heart that I would see the project to its completion. Work kept me busy, yes, to the point of staying in the office every day for weeks; to the point of developing tired eyes and stress tics. But I learned that being busy and being stressed are not the same thing. When you like where you are and like what you do, no work is too stressful, and no measure of time feels wasted.

The truth is, there is no such thing as a perfect project. Just when you think you are finally on top of everything, it begins to change. Despite the many challenges our project was faced with, I never felt like I had to drag my feet to work.

Why? Because every day I clocked in, I knew how incredibly fortunate I was to be part of a team that was trying to help build a nation. I was in a place where my opinions were listened to and respected by people superior to me. I was in a place where I was learning and evolving. I was grateful every day to be a part of something that would invoke change, but at the same time would change me. Closing chapters can be sad, but I ended my contract with a sense of pride, hope, and optimism. The knowledge that I had come out stronger and wiser from a year's worth of challenges meant that I was, ever after, secure in my ability to survive. In a world full of change and challenge, this knowledge is worth more than anything else I could've asked for.

Project Team photo taken after the Team Update Meeting held on December 15, 2015 at Henry Sy, Sr. Hall, DLSU Manila

Photo taken during fieldwork in Arakan, North Cotabato in Mindanao on October 16,2014 for the project "Communication Analysis of Maternal and Neonatal Health," funded by UNICEF.

DLSU-CLA RESEARCH APPRENTICESHIP AT SDRC:
A Personal Chronicle

Crisanto Q. Regadio Jr., MS
Ph.D. Apprentice

Looking for the possibility of promoting my research skills and advancing my professional career through actual involvement in research activities, I applied for the Research Apprenticeship Program of the College of Liberal Arts of De La Salle University. I was assigned to the Social Development Research Center for a three-year apprenticeship, and have finally finished the course work for my PhD in the Sociology program at the Behavioral Sciences Department. I have been working on my dissertation—under the supervision of my mentor, Dr. Melvin Jabar—on the significance of educational experiences among Muslim youth in their identity formation. Doc Melvin was the director of the Center during the first three months of my apprenticeship, and I personally consider his guidance as being influential in the course of my research and scholarship.

The first two weeks of my stay at the Center during the third term of academic year 2013-2014 were spent on my trying to fit into a new work environment. I had been teaching for the last six years and spent most of my time in a classroom environment. Thus I was anxious and disconcerted at first because I was not used to working in a weekday-office hour setting. My placement as an apprentice at the Center happened so fast that I was not given a formal orientation of what my tasks would be prior to meeting my colleagues in actual field work. Mark Anthony Velasco, a fellow research apprentice at the Center, and Klarizze Valdoria,

who was the first research assistant I worked with, provided me with enough introductory knowledge to find my niche. There was no formal design or template to promote my research skills, since I was never given a handout or a manual of what I would be doing. Yet, my involvement from one project to another enabled me to learn far more than I would have from a pre-designed template. Through these experiences I was able to draw the ins and outs of a research activity, and I guess this has served me well.

My first task at the Center was to record, transcribe and prepare the minutes of the quantitative analysis workshop for the "Women with Disability Taking Action on Reproductive and Sexual Health (W-DARE)" project. I thought that documenting the workshop, which was conducted through support from AusAID and UNFPA under Dr. Jesusa M. Marco, would be a boring task. However, the assignment became an opportunity for me to understand the struggles and challenges of women with disability, and to understand inclusive research. The workshop also provided a crash course on regression analysis. The initial activity at the event was a sharing of the enumerators' experiences in the field and the condition of the respondents of the study. The edifying and touching stories are still crystal clear to me. They were real-life experiences that were previously unknown to me because I had been confined to life in my classroom. The only way I could have gotten hold of information about women with disability was through available literature and reference materials. The enumerators were also PWDs and members of organizations promoting and advancing the interests of this marginalized group.

The workshop was an inclusive research activity. It taught me the importance of the actual participation of stakeholders in exploring how to achieve a deeper socio-psychological, political and economic understanding of their situation. For the last part of the workshop focusing on regression analysis, Dr. Manjula Marella of the University of Melbourne discussed in simple terms the complex plan for the data analysis, thus making the approach easy to understand.

Next, I was drafted as a replacement for one of the field researchers in a project funded by Unilab Foundation. The research, conducted under Dr. Roberto E. Javier, Jr., sought to understand the journey of persons with autism and other forms of intellectual disability, and their inclusion in the workplace. I was tasked to facilitate a focus group discussion and to conduct key informant interviews with employees and workers, and observed the dynamics of a workplace that employed "exceptional individuals." The instrument that was utilized integrated some of the adjustments made during the actual pilot interview. This led me to realize that a research activity involving

efforts of different sectors toward the promotion of a more inclusive society. This happened at the same time that my foundation in sociological theories and concepts was advanced under the supervision of Dr. Exaltacion Lamberte, Dr. Dianna Veloso, and Dr. Jabar. I chose the latter to be my mentor and my adviser for my dissertation.

actual people and communities should not be rigid and methodical. I also observed that the role of post-data collection assessment is crucial to the adjustment and modification of the research methodology, allowing for a more extensive exploration of the different dimensions of the subject. The open-mindedness of the primary researcher is key to realizing this process. The venue for making such assessments could be as informal as a lunch or merienda after the data gathering activity.

It came as a surprise when, in the midst of the data gathering activity, we were told to prepare our own manuscript to be incorporated into the published results of the study. I was given the task of exploring and writing about the experience of Unilab Foundation in advocating, by example, for the inclusion of “exceptional individuals.” This was my first publication and one of the finest examples of the constructive training I gained as an apprentice at SDRC. I might have been a substitute for this project, but the experience completely changed my understanding of the situation of PWDs, and the

Without the usual course work I had to accomplish for my PhD, I spent most of my time during the summer doing field work. March was spent on my collaboration with Mark Velasco to come up with our petit-research project. Funding in the amount of a P100,000 research grant was provided by the University Research Coordinating Office (URCO). Mark served as the principal researcher for the study and we worked with another graduate student, Marie Bembi Girado. I was able to explore the different phases of a research activity from the inception to the actual research design, the development of the research instrument, identifying linkages and processing of approval from local government units, government agencies and communities, actual data gathering, and the report write-up. We were able to explore the condition of resettlement communities in Malabon and Parañaque in Metro Manila and Calamba in Laguna, and the significance of land title and ownership in the promotion of human, social and economic capital. The initial publication of the research output was part of SDRC's Occasional Paper Series.

Most students love summer because it is a time to go out of town and enjoy the different vacation spots (e.g. Boracay, Puerto Galera and El Nido, Palawan) our country has to offer. I, on the other hand, spent most of my summer out of town working on two projects. Both involved post-disaster scenarios after Typhoon Yolanda. For the first project, I worked as a field supervisor with the World Health Organization Disability Survey which concentrated on Region VIII, under the new SDRC director, Dr. Caring Tarroja. The second project, under Dr. Dianna Veloso, was a baseline study on the child protection situation in different areas affected by the devastating typhoon. Here, I was tasked to work as a collaborator. In both studies I was assigned to go on field to recruit and organize the training of enumerators, and to supervise the data collection.

Life is not a fairy tale, and neither were the stories in the field during these research activities. My field work extended to different islands in the Visayas region, from Samar to Cebu to Iloilo. The team tried the best and worst transport service in the country during the island hop. I met and worked with different types of people, from the pleasant and amusing to the indifferent and the difficult. With the help of the SDRC staff, through texts, phone calls and e-mails, I was able to get through the different activities involved in the projects as well as the trials. The research staff provided me with more than knowledge of the technicalities and standard protocol. They were sympathetic, especially when it came time to confront the consequences of the hasty decisions made during field work. Dr. Tarroja's trusting and encouraging nature provided a constructive and practical approach to mediating the different issues involved in handling the research activities I was involved in.

The best part of the experience was the opportunity to work and negotiate with international organizations and to realize the differences in the work dynamics of these organizations. Their compliance with standard processes and protocols and their work ethics were some of the valuable lessons I learned. Another exciting thing I learned involved the standard and format of the research instrument and sampling methodology utilized by international organizations in conducting quantitative study. The sampling is meticulous and methodical—it aims at ruling out all bias and promotes the equitable representation of the population of the study. The research instrument used in the survey was translated into different languages, and blind translated to ensure it was explicit enough for the respondents to understand without compromising its meaning. The survey activity I participated in during the summer made me realize that the translation of the research instrument and the capacity of the enumerator to convey the questions plainly and precisely should be given prime importance. These have a direct impact on the quality of the findings and on the resulting reports of a research activity.

With the increasing demands of my course work during the first term of academic year 2014-2015, I was given minimal research tasks at the Center. This served my interests well because I was able to apply some of the newly developed

research skills I had developed in my course requirements. It was also during my second term that I made a courtesy call on the new Director of Research and Advanced Studies at the College of Liberal Arts, Dr. Elenita R. Garcia. She encouraged me to focus on the subjects I was most interested in, and to maximize the time I had for doing my course work by exploring this subject. This is the same advice that we received from Dr. Raymond Tan, the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, when he met all the research apprentices of the University for consultation and briefing.

And so, I spent most of my time exploring Muslim communities in Metro Manila and in Pampanga, and the different issues of their migration, under the guidance of Dr. Marlon Era and Dr. Jabar. This helped me a lot in framing my dissertation topic. Also during this time, I was given the opportunity to enter into a research collaboration with one of my classmates in the doctoral program, Peter Pinlac. We were guided by our adviser in the area of Sociology of Education, Dr. Jabar, to work on the content analysis of the mission and vision of selected HEIs in the country. Meanwhile, Dr. Romeo Lee's lecture on globalization and our course work on this topic provided a challenge to re-align my Sociology with a more Positivistic discourse. At SDRC, I was assigned to assist Dr. Hazel Biana and her research team in attaining the objectives of a study entitled “Reclaiming Filipino Indigenous Cultures through Teaching and Learning.” For this project, supported by the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia (UBCHEA), I was tasked to gather curricula and course syllabi from selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Metro Manila.

During the second term of school year 2014-2015, I was again given time by SDRC to focus on my studies. This is because I was taking up the final set of subjects toward the completion of my course work. The Center assigned me to work with a research team, under the directorship of Prof. Ma. Angeles Lapeña, on a project funded by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). For this project, “Communication Analysis of Maternal and Neonatal Health with Emphasis on the Role of Community Health Teams in Facilitating the Adoption of Positive Behaviors in the Context of Conflict and Rapid Urbanization in Selected LGUs in Mindanao and Quezon City,” I was assigned to be the research assistant of Dr. Homer Yabut. He served as my supervisor during the study's data gathering, and later as a mentor when my apprenticeship advanced to its second year. I was also tasked to establish linkages with the local government units and health providers in Quezon City, and organized the data collection activity.

In Arakan and President Roxas in North Cotabato, I was assigned to establish linkages and to secure permission to conduct the studies in our respective localities; to recruit local researchers; to organize the data collection activity; and, under the supervision of Dr. Yabut, to conduct focus group discussions and key informant interviews as well as to prepare the report. After the data collection activity, Dr. Yabut allowed me to work with him on the report. The rest of the term was spent on burning my brow to complete all my course requirements.

This was also the term when I made an ethnographic attempt to understand the complexity of the political organization inside the Salam Compound in Barangay Culiat, Quezon City. The research was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Josefina Socorro Tondo for her Sociology of Complex Organizations class. I was able to produce a report that caught the attention of Dr. Dennis Erasga of the Behavioral Science Department, and with his help I was motivated to explore more of the unique character of the migration of Muslims in different parts of the country. Through the profound and insightful discussions I had with Dr. Tondo and Dr. Erasga on this subject, I was able to come up with the term “Morospora,” which I guess will become the conceptual foundation of all my future researches on Muslim migration in the Philippines. It was also a time for me to explore the possibility of engaging in macro-research on education after I was encouraged by Dr. Tereso Tullao, Jr. to assess the optimization of R&D capacity among SUCs in relation to their state funding. The resulting paper was delivered during the 2015 DLSU Research Congress.

After the completion of the course work for my PhD in Sociology with a track in Sociology of Education, I was given the chance to work on education-related research at the Center. The New Year provided me with a break from health-related research through a needs assessment study of the schools and communities that are beneficiaries of Holcim's Fostering a Child's Education (FACE) Project. With Dr. Jabar as project director, I was assigned to be a local researcher for some areas in Bulacan and the province of La Union. I was tasked to establish linkages and to solicit approval from the different levels of education administrative organizations; to organize the data gathering activity; and to conduct focus group discussions among teachers, students and parents. These undertakings granted me not just the opportunity to have a first-hand experience in conducting interviews and focus group discussions with young participants, but also to understand the actual condition and dynamics of

administration in the country's public education system. It almost served as a pilot study in my attempt to understand Muslim secondary students in Cotabato City for my dissertation.

My participation in the UBCHEA project extended to the preparation of an IP community for the immersion program of participants in the Workshop on Curriculum Development for the Integration of Filipino Indigenous Culture (CD-IFIC), and to the preparation and facilitation of focus group discussions on the same topic among professors of selected HEIs in Pampanga. The tasks afforded me a chance to see the dynamics of linkaging and of processing requests to conduct activities in an IP community that was monitored and regulated by the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), which is tasked with protecting the rights of IPs. The immersion activity held in Villa Maria, Porac, Pampanga rejuvenated my desire to promote my Bahaghari Program to motivate children from marginalized communities to pursue education through the arts and creativity.

I was able to finish the course requirements for my doctorate and have started my journey toward the preparation of a dissertation proposal. The academic training during my course work and my research apprenticeship at SDRC have prepared me with useful theoretical and practical research skills and tools that will aid in composing my research proposal. Thanks are due to Prof. Cristina Rodriguez of the Behavioral Sciences Department, who painstakingly facilitated the development of my course work by assigning the best mentor for each subject my classmates and I took in the PhD in Sociology program. Some of the papers I submitted in my classes were accepted for presentation in local and international conferences, thanks also to the tutelage of my adviser and former professors. The program also gave me space to extend my social capital among leading scholars and academicians in the university. The pep talks they gave me over coffee, during seminars and conferences, or breaks during strategic planning meetings helped expand the horizon of my scholarship from Sociology to Anthropology, Psychology, Statistics, History and even to the field of Management and Health. For all its ups and downs, my participation in the apprenticeship program clearly redefined the direction of both my academic and research careers.

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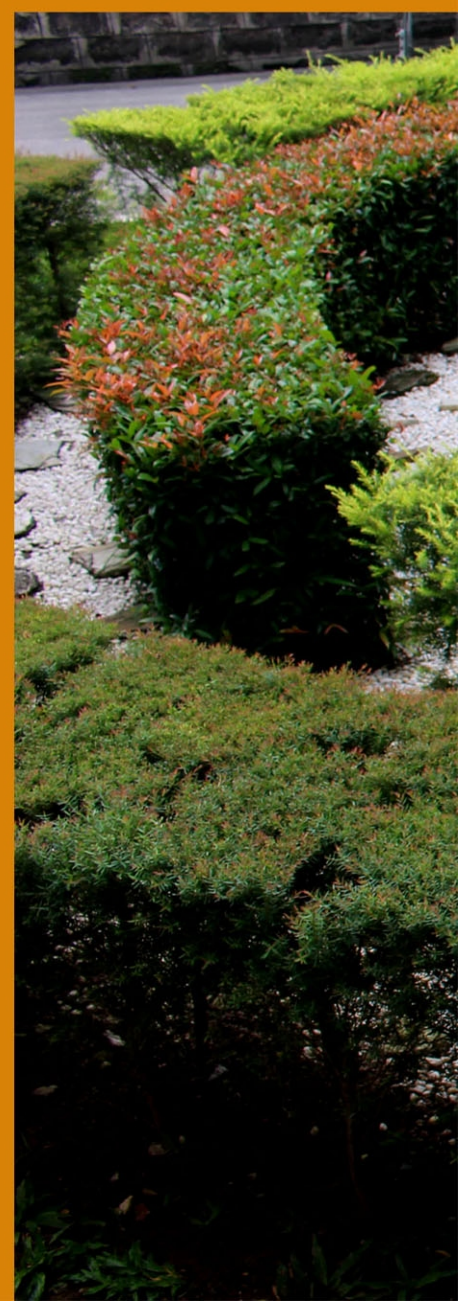

Cover Photo by: Maria Catherine D. Domingo
"The Labyrinth"