

Foreword

The *Philippine Journal of Social Development* Volume 18 (2025) showcases six articles submitted by participants in the 10th Biennial Conference of the International Consortium for Social Development-Asia Pacific (ICSD-AP). The Conference was hosted by the College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines Diliman, from October 23–24, 2024. The theme of the ICSD-AP was “The Fifth Industrial Revolution Amidst Multifaceted Disruptions: Harnessing the Power of Social Development.” It showcased the “role of social development such that social innovations and responses to disruptions create effective pathways towards the eradication of poverty and inequality” (ICSD Concept Note, 2024).

Humanity now lives under urgent challenges that social development strategies need to address: inequalities that are getting more extreme as the rich become mega-billionaires, with a tiny few controlling half of the world’s wealth; a pandemic that has killed millions and may be followed by more episodes of various mutations and consequent global health emergencies; a climate emergency that threatens all life on earth coupled with other forms of environmental destruction; and technology, principally digitalization, threatening to create more unemployment and exclusion of the already poor and vulnerable. Armed conflicts, racial, ethnic, and gender-based violence have erupted and intensified in both North and South of the globe, making a just and enduring peace an elusive goal. Escalation of war and violation of sovereignty in the rush to control oil and other vital resources now are alarming topics in our daily news. Bad governance, best exemplified by the mega-corruption scandals in our country, has combined with ever deepening indebtedness, moving us closer to a fiscal abyss.

One word to describe all this is “polycrisis,” when economic, political,

environmental, and social crises combine, interact, mutually reinforce and amplify each other, aggravating expected negative outcomes. Social development gives us the lens to tease out the elements of polycrisis even at the micro level, where it can manifest as continuing lack of adequate housing, inability to take advantage of opportunities to acquire international education, or as a mixture of disadvantages experienced by Filipino women workers given the impact of digitalization and COVID-19, as discussed in three of the papers in this issue.

The papers included in this volume illustrate how social issues such as inequality, discrimination, ostracism, violence, and poor governance continue to define relationships in our communities amidst the current polycrisis and the digital age. New technologies, perspectives, and policies associated with the 5th Industrial Revolution and the digital universe have so far failed to alleviate poverty and disempowerment. For instance, researchers from the Tagoloan Community College note that while informal settlers in Cagayan de Oro, who were relocated after a flood that swept away their homes, welcome ownership of more secure housing, other basic needs remain unmet in their resettlement community, including access to potable water, a functioning sewerage system, and transportation to centers of work. More problematic is the absence of a sustainable livelihood program, especially for those whose former employments are no longer accessible in the new habitat.

In Bangladesh, Umme Zarin Tasnim's paper reveals that, while many students desire to pursue higher education abroad to hone their skills in critical thinking, research, and global awareness, only students from wealthy families are able to pursue this aspiration. Poverty, lack of financial support from the family, and little or no personal savings are significant impediments to accessing international higher education opportunities for Bangladeshi students. Within Hmong migrant communities in the United States, Pa Nhia Xiong collected the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ persons. Despite significant progress in the U.S. to recognize LGBTQI+, within the Hmong community discussions about LGBTQI+ identities are considered "taboo and, in most cases, nonexistent. Additionally, in traditional Hmong shamanism, spirituality is inherently gendered, and reincarnation is believed to reinforce binary gender roles" (Pa Nhia Xiong, in this volume).

Despite these pictures of inequality and human insecurity, other papers

in this volume herald the importance of collective action, innovation, unity of purpose, and individual agency for development. Konde Lingaswamy describes the critical role played by Farmer Producing Organizations (FPOs) among the tribal communities of Andhra Pradesh, India. The FPOs were introduced by the government as mechanisms to address the shifts in the agricultural practices of tribal groups, from self-sufficiency to increased agricultural productivity for markets beyond their communities. It was underscored that the members of the FPOs are mostly women, who actively participate in general assembly meetings, in business planning, and day-to-day operations of the organization. The stereotype of women's invisibility in agricultural production was effectively disputed. In turn, Velasco and Ofreneo documented how collective action enables organized women workers in the Philippines to cope with the COVID-19 lockdown. Even while the lockdown affected the work status of women in the workers' organizations, it opened up opportunities for them to acquire relevant skills and develop innovative approaches to work and organizational life. The digital space became a platform for personal and organizational activities, through the exercise of individual agency and collective action in the use of digital technology.

Away from digital frontiers of collective action, Michael BJ S. Abellana illustrates the power of religion as a force for community development. In Upi, Maguindanao del Norte, a tri-people community has flourished despite religious diversity. There are persons who are Teduray indigenous faith believers, Christians, or Muslims. Together, they have held numerous peacebuilding activities to realize their vision of peace and development, formalized as "Upi: Haven of an Empowered Tri-People." Community development principles form the bases for unity between the religious institutions and are leveraged in community peacebuilding.

Social development theory is anchored on the promotion of human rights and the attainment of individual and collective well-being. This worldview is applied to give meaning to relationships, norms, situations, and other events observed in all aspects of our lives. For this worldview to apply concretely to specific circumstances, it is also important to have an intersectional perspective, and show how hierarchical power relations based on class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and other differentiating factors interact to create multiple identities and forms of discrimination. These power relations determine which groups are

privileged and which are disadvantaged in particular contexts.

The articles in this volume provide glimpses of social circumstances that different groups across Asia and the Pacific experience using an intersectional lens. It illustrates the difficulties faced by resettled families, economic deterrents to the pursuit of higher education, and the ostracism of LGBTQI+ identities because of traditional culture. But the suggested solutions remain constant—to develop strategies and actions that promote equality, social inclusion, resilience, and sustainable well-being. Moreover, all procedures for development need to emanate from individual choices and aspirations, as translated in collective action within organized groups and across stakeholder assemblies.

The innovations and technologies of the 5th Industrial Revolution will be meaningful to society if they will enable the attainment of these goals of sustainable human development despite the current polycrisis.

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