

# Framing Research in Social Development Thinking and Practice: The DSD Experience

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*This study examines the trends in social development (SD) perspectives, strategies, and processes gleaned from the dissertations of doctoral graduates of the UP-CSWCD Doctor of Social Development (DSD) program from 2014 to 2019. Thirteen (13) dissertations of DSD graduates were used as case materials in drawing out lessons in SD research.*

*Two major trends emerged from the 13 dissertations: one, what are the defining features of SD research, and two, knowledge-building and meaning-making initiatives. Two guiding features differentiate SD research from mainstream social research: (1) a clear standpoint and bias for the poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged groups and communities; and (2) privileging the voices and perspectives of the poor, the marginalized, and the disadvantaged.*

*In terms of knowledge-building and meaning-making, significant themes were noted: (1) community organizing-community development (CO-CD) perspectives are embedded in SD concepts, strategies, and processes; (2) feminist perspectives complement and enhance SD knowledge building by examining gender and power relations within social institutions (i.e., family, community organizations, market, and the State); and, (3) the dissertations provide a learning platform for DSD students to engage in development discourse and grounded theorizing. The research participants are generally regarded as co-learners in the research process. The paper concludes by citing the implications and challenges to Social Development as an academic discipline in the context of policy development and planning, theorizing, and curricular development and enhancement.*

**Key words:** social development, SD research, DSD program, development practice, SD as an academic discipline

## **I. Introduction**

In celebration of its 10<sup>th</sup> year, the Doctor of Social Development (DSD) Program of the University of the Philippines-College of Social Work and Community Development (UP-CSWCD) embarks on a review of its major accomplishments. Among its knowledge products are 13 doctoral dissertations that surface emerging themes in social development discourse and practice. Using these as case materials, this study examines the trends in social development (SD) perspectives, strategies, and processes gleaned from the dissertations of graduates of the Doctor of Social Development (DSD) Program from 2014 to 2019. Insights from this review can inform curricular development, classroom pedagogy as well as program management concerns.

SD perspectives have evolved over the years. From the activism of social work leaders in the 1900s who subscribed to SD as a philosophy in improving the quality of life, theorizing and research have resulted to varied conceptions of SD. Western academics like Booth (1994) even claimed that SD research had reached an “impasse” by failing to define its trajectory and the difficulty encountered by researchers in linking theory to practice. Thus, he contended, that SD needs rethinking.

On the other hand, Edwards (1994) even questioned its relevance in lieu of the continuing mass poverty in developing countries. In the Philippines, the relevance of SD as a development strategy to improve the lives of the people and to end poverty has been recognized by the government as reflected in the Medium-Term Development Plans of various administrations. Likewise, SD remains relevant to civil society organizations, development practitioners, and scholars who work with the grassroots sectors in the different parts of the country. The 13 dissertations of DSD graduates mirror this relevance.

This article has four major sections: (1) a presentation of the varying SD perspectives and concepts as these evolved over time; (2) a summary of the 13 dissertations in terms of topics, topic sources, contexts, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research methodologies and methods, and research outputs; (3) trends as presented in these dissertations; and, (4) implications of the findings on SD as an academic discipline and as practice.

## **II. Meanings and Perspectives of Social Development**

### *A. Definitions of Social Development*

Over the years, many authors have claimed difficulty in defining SD. For instance, Blumer (1966:16 cited in Bautista, 1997:3), in his classic paper, “The Meaning of Social Development,” argued that the notion of SD is “vague and confused” because countries differ in their goals, strategies, and metrics in achieving SD. Some years later, Macpherson (1989:70 cited in Bautista, 1997:3) proposed a generic definition of SD which is the “enhancement of well-being and the progressive enrichment of the quality of people’s lives.”

To further clarify the meaning of development, the United Nations Center for Regional Development (1988) focused on the “social” aspects of development, giving emphasis on the non-economic factors that contribute to the improvement of the quality of life – in particular, those concerning people. Likewise, the definition used by the Institute of Social Studies (ISS, 2013) has placed people at the center of the development processes – particularly the poor. This, however, acknowledges that social relations and norms in a given group or society shape the processes of SD. Thus, such conceptualization implies institutional change, not only in formal but informal institutions as well.

Consequently, the ISS has developed the *Indices of Social Development* – focusing on the areas of civic activism, clubs and associations, inter-group cohesion, interpersonal safety and trust, and gender equality – to measure the role of informal social institutions and argued that their contributions to the development processes be recognized since they are given limited attention in SD discourse.

While many international agencies and other UN bodies prefer the term social development, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) uses the term human development instead. The notion of human development used by UNDP (1999) was further developed in later years based on the work of Sen (1999) as a means to enlarge the choices and opportunities of people. By the late 1990s, Jacobs and Cleveland (1999) described SD as a process of tapping human resources and initiatives to attain social and economic objectives. From then on, notions of SD have continued to evolve as informed by various disciplines, theoretical frameworks, researches, and practices.

At present, SD is associated with community-based projects and programs in developing countries that include, but are not limited to, cooperatives-building, self-help women's organizations, maternal and child health, provision of safe water, construction of education and health infrastructures, to cite a few. SD also refers to government social policies and programs such as poverty reduction, education and literacy improvement, maternal and infant mortality reduction, elimination of gender discrimination and oppression, political participation, and improvement in sanitation. In academic disciplines, sociologists associate SD with social change for the betterment of society; social workers equate it to community-based projects; psychologists associate SD to child development; and in social policy, SD is about social improvements due to the welfare interventions of governments (Midgley, 2014).

As drawn out from SD practice, the goals, key components, approaches, and strategies of SD have been popularized. In contrast to debates around SD definitions, discourse on SD goals is not fully problematized as pointed out by Midgley (2014:48):

*Although a variety of goals are mentioned in the literature, they are seldom defined in concrete terms or formulated as a coherent conception of the desirable end state that social development seeks to achieve... reflect[ing] the tendency among social development scholars to rhetorically use value-laden terms rather than grapple with the complexity of defining goals such as 'social change,' 'equality,' 'progress,' and 'social justice,' which are often bandied about in the academic literature on the assumption that their meaning is self-evident. However, when linked to different normative perspectives, these concepts are interpreted very differently. For example, the notion of social justice which now pervades the social development literature is defined in different ways by market liberals, Catholic social thinkers, Marxists and social democrats.*

Midgley (2014) also noted that, aside from abstract goals, material goals are also important. These goals are more exact, observable, and easily operationalized through the use of metrics such as indicators and indices. The Index of Social Progress (ISP), the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), and the more recent Human Development Index (HDI) are examples of such indices. Further, he noted the importance of linking the goals to the state or condition which SD aims to change. It may also be noted that the existing research studies on inequality and social capital provide the possibility of the operationalization of such an abstract goal.

SD goals include abstract and lofty ideals such as peace, equality, rights, and social justice. In some cases, material goals such as poverty alleviation and access to opportunity are often hinged on these abstract goals. On the other hand, SD practitioners and scholars subsume SD outputs into a single goal such as improved well-being, gender equality, or improved quality of life. The goal “to foster the emergence and implementation of a social structure in which all citizens are entitled to equal social, economic, and political rights and equal access to status, roles, prerogatives, and responsibilities, regardless of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, or disability” articulated by Chandler (1986:151) provides a very broad goal encompassing several concerns.

Scholars also give attention to the principles and values of SD. For instance, Chandler (1986) noted that cooperation, participatory planning and decision-making, nondiscrimination, and distributive justice are some of the principles of SD. She also cited a study by Falk (1981) that values participation, respect for human dignity, humanism, nondiscrimination, and global awareness as important to SD practitioners in the field of social work.

Further, Chandler (1986) pointed out the parallel values of SD and feminism that include participation, respect for human dignity, and institutional equity, implying that ideas of feminism are embedded in the SD perspective in social work. Such similarities include: (1) placing importance on citizen participation in civic, democratic, and political decision-making; (2) developing grassroots leadership; (3) community planning with the people rather than for them; (4) treating women and “clients” with respect and dignity; and (5) critically examining institutional systems that foster and perpetuate inequity by challenging such systems.

### *B. Theoretical Foundations of Social Development*

According to Midgley (2014), though SD is rich in its practice, SD literature revealed a deficiency in theorizing and theory-building. Despite this claim, practitioners and researchers in both developed and developing countries continue to enhance SD theorizing. Midgley (2014) further noted that the varied definitions of SD reflect a rich tradition of theoretical perspectives on which these conceptualizations are hinged. Midgley (2003) also classified the various theoretical perspectives that influence SD practice as follows:

- The *livelihood perspective* has its roots in individual ideology and rational choice theory which is based on the assumption that household members, though living in poverty, are rational actors who have the choice to address their conditions.
- The *gender perspective* started with the critique of the non-recognition of women's contribution to development as well as the impact of patriarchal culture on the oppression of women. These critiques resulted to efforts in attention to gender as a development concern. Gradually, it has been mainstreamed in SD thinking and practice. With the mainstreaming of gender in SD, programs and services are no longer confined to the conventional maternal and child welfare interventions, but also include the promotion of gender equality, women's rights, and economic development to alleviate women's poverty. Such focus is premised on the assumption that the participation of women in SD is an important productive contribution. Eventually, an empowerment approach was adopted that promotes women's self-determination and control over their lives through a bottom-up strategy. This strategy includes mobilizing, campaigning, organizing, and collective action against patriarchy, neoliberalism, and imperialism to address gender oppression. The concept of empowerment has been a major aspect of activism among women's organizations in responding to oppressive gender practices, promoting economic participation, and influencing State policy and international development organizations. SD approaches such as community development, asset-building, and microenterprise are often associated with the gender perspective.
- The *community participatory perspective* is oriented in activism. Starting from a critique of top-down SD, it gives importance to concepts such as social capital, civil society, social entrepreneurship, and social economy. It draws its ideas from populism and posits that communities and civil society organizations are in the best position to achieve SD goals based on the assumption that communities can mobilize local resources, decide on their own development, and implement community projects. Through community organizing, people in communities can form organizations (e.g., community-based cooperatives); commit their time, effort, and resources; and fully participate in decisions that affect them. It posits that, for community-based SD initiatives to succeed, the full participation of people as well as their access

to government and donor support are needed. It then poses a critique of the conventional community development approach, the central role of the government, and the strong influence of market liberal ideas in SD. Likewise, this perspective recognizes the role of social movements as a SD strategy because of their role in mobilizing people and communities for social change.

- The enterprise perspective argues that participation in the market is a better strategy in achieving SD goals. It is influenced by market liberal ideas such as incentives, competition, and profit as effective strategies in realizing community development as well as in reducing poverty. This perspective advocates the notions of “social entrepreneurship,” “social business,” “social economy,” “philanthro-capitalism,” and “corporate social responsibility” (p.58). It proposes that to ensure participation of the poor in the market, the government has a crucial role to play by lowering taxes, deregulating the market economy, privatizing services, and implementing market-friendly policies. Microfinance and microenterprise are among its preferred strategies.
- The *environmental or sustainable development perspective* is a result of the critique that economic growth, with its concomitant consumerism fueled by capitalism, has caused destruction to the environment. The unstoppable focus on economic growth has bred global problems like pollution, environmental degradation, deforestation, and other forms of ecological destruction. The negative impact of ecological damage has propelled international bodies to promote ecological projects in communities. This perspective promotes the adoption of sustainable development as a strategy in SD. The most important principle of this perspective is the recognition that economic development should meet the needs of this generation but without compromising the lives of future generations.
- The *statist perspective* argues that the government has both the capacity and authority to implement SD interventions and achieve SD goals. Based on social science thinking, technical planning, and efficient management, the government is viewed as the best promoter of its citizens’ well-being on the following grounds: (1) It has the authority to implement SD programs through the enactment of laws, regulation, and the provision of resources and social services; (2) It has the capacity to mobilize

both domestic and international resources for SD goals in partnership with international agencies and other governments; (3) It has the macro perspective to allocate resources to the most in need; and, (4) It has the regulatory role to direct the market to work towards the interest of the majority. This perspective promotes the idea that the citizens have ownership of the State in which the latter has accountability to the former. Socio-economic planning, redistributive growth, basic needs and rights-based are approaches that subscribe to this perspective.

Alongside these theoretical foundations, SD has developed different approaches and strategies culled from its long tradition of practice. These are categorized as follows: the development of human capital, social capital, community development and its key components – community-building, community action, community economic development, promotion of decent work and employment, microenterprise/microfinance, asset development, social protection, social planning, and social rights (Midgley, 2014).

In the Philippines, practitioners incessantly do research to help refine the *whats*, *whys* and *hows* of SD. For instance, Venus-Maslang (2013), in her study on the roles of non-government and community-based organizations in sustaining SD efforts, emphasized that the interactions of socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors impact on SD projects. Likewise, the 13 dissertations are knowledge products that can provide added ideas that could inform theorizing and practice in the country.

### **III. Summary of DSD Dissertations**

This section contains a summary of research topics, sources of topics, contexts, theoretical/conceptual frameworks, research methodologies and methods used, and research outputs.

#### ***A. Focus of SD Research Studies: Topics, Interest Groups, and Contexts***

From 2014-2019, a total of 13 dissertations were produced by graduates of the Doctor of Social Development Program of the College of Social Work and Community Development. The focus of the research studies in terms of topics, interest groups, and research contexts can be categorized as follows:



- Surfacing the conditions of marginalized groups through their own voices: children of migrant parents (Abenir, 2014), urban poor women in the sandwich generation (Columna-Tongson, 2019), humanitarian workers (Paez-Beltejar, 2015), prisoners (Rueda-Acosta, 2015), and rural poor women (Villamor-Barrameda, 2015);
- Testing out indigenous SD concepts such as well-being (Meneses, 2016) and flourishing (Will, 2014), and SD strategies and processes such as community governance (Carolino, 2016), citizen participation (Dumaraos, 2014), participation, capacity building, and community building (Le, 2015), and social enterprises (Pham, 2014);
- Exploring grassroots' agency and organized responses: organized women's responses to poor housing systems and programs (Laguilles-Timog, 2018) and efforts of women in the informal economy in transforming their lives and communities (Verceles, 2014).

The interest groups of these research studies include: children of migrant workers (Abenir, 2014), internal migrants (Le, 2015), prisoners (Rueda-Acosta, 2015), urban poor women (Columna-Tongson, 2019; Laguilles-Timog, 2018), women in the informal economy (Verceles, 2014), rural poor women (Villamor-Barrameda, 2015), humanitarian workers (Paez-Beltejar, 2015), fisherfolk and farmers (Carolino, 2016; Dumaraos, 2014), indigenous peoples (Meneses, 2016; Will, 2014), and owners of social enterprises (Pham, 2014).

### ***B. Dissertation Contexts***

These research studies were conducted under the following contexts: children of migrants as community of interest (Abenir, 2015), disaster situations (Paez-Beltejar, 2015; Villamor-Barrameda, 2015), prisons/detention centers (Rueda-Acosta, 2015), socialist State (Le, 2015; Pham, 2014), coastal communities (Carolino, 2016), agricultural/fishery councils (Dumaraos, 2014), urban poor communities (Columna-Tongson, 2019; Laguilles-Timog, 2018), conflict-ridden communities of indigenous peoples (Will, 2014), communities of indigenous peoples (Meneses, 2016), and informal economy (Verceles, 2014).

### C. Sources of Dissertation Topics

There are three major sources of dissertation topics: (1) personal experiences, (2) personal advocacies and research interests, and (3) development practice. Dissertations that were inspired by personal experiences are as follows:

- Mark Anthony Abenir (2014) drew inspiration for his dissertation, *In Their Voices: The Rights and Capabilities of the Anak ng OFWs*, from his personal experience as a son of a migrant father.
- Zenaida Paez-Beltejar (2015) has decades of experience as a social worker of a leading humanitarian organization in the country. Her dissertation, *Caring for Carers. Psychosocial Support to Humanitarian Workers in Coping with Disasters: The Case of the Philippine Red Cross in the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban City*, was borne out of her experience being “in the line of fire” during Typhoon Haiyan.
- Teresita Villamor Barrameda (2015) survived various typhoons while on fieldwork as a development worker and her personal experience of Typhoon Ondoy developed her interest in studying the intersection of gender, poverty, and disasters and had published articles and did presentations in both local and international conferences on the topic. In her dissertation, *Stories Women Tell: Rural Women’s Narratives of Their Lived Experiences of Poverty, Recurrent Typhoons and Disasters*, she wove the life stories of 10 rural poor women with her experience as the “insider/outsider” in the research community that was once her residence in her childhood years.
- Excelsa Columna-Tongson (2019) experienced being in the sandwich generation – caring for both her family and her-father-in-law – while simultaneously working as a faculty member in the College of Home Economics and as a student of the DSD program. This personal experience inspired her dissertation, *Potentials and Possibilities for Caring: The Voices of Low-Income Urban Women in the Sandwich Generation*, which she called a problem that has no local name.

Other research studies were drawn from the development practice of graduates such as the following:

- Pham Tien Nam (2014) has been into development work since working in his home country of Vietnam and in the Philippines. As board member of an advocacy organization for children's rights in the Philippines, his interest in the workings of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the context of a centralized socialist State became the basis for his dissertation, *Non-State Partners in Social Development in Vietnam: Organizations, Issues and Processes*.
- Pedro Dumaraos Jr. (2014), as a staff of the Department of Agriculture, has observed the development and problems of the agricultural and fishery councils (AFCs) as mechanisms for people's participation. His experience and observation on the uneven development of these mechanisms led him to develop his dissertation, *Images and Voices of Citizens' Participation in Local Governance: Potentials and Challenges of Agricultural and Fishery Councils as Participatory Mechanisms*, to interrogate the elements that made some AFCs functional while others were not.
- Matthew Will (2014) has been exposed to the indigenous peoples of Mindanao through his faith ministry and his dissertation, *Kaelleuman Hap: A Yakan Experience of Flourishing Amidst Conflict*, which fueled his passion to understand indigenous notions of development and flourishing.
- Le Van Cong (2015) has been involved with CSOs in Vietnam and in the Philippines as a development practitioner and as a lawyer catering to the needs and concerns of Vietnamese migrants in Palawan. His dissertation, *Participation in Community-building Among Internal Migrants in Eahdil Village in Vietnam*, was the result of his interest in working with Vietnamese migrants within and outside his home country.
- Persida Rueda-Acosta (2015), as Chief of the Public Attorney's Office (PAO), has been exposed to the appalling conditions of inmates and the sub-standard facilities in prisons and detention centers while doing her regular rounds in monitoring cases of prisoners handled by the PAO, developed her dissertation, *Examining Deaths Behind Bars: Toward Penal System Policy Reforms in the Context of Human Rights*, as her response to alleviate the inmates' conditions by proposing policy reforms from a human rights perspective.

- Juliet Carolino (2016) is a development worker with academic background in both community development and public administration. Her dissertation, *Social Development Realities and Practices in Community Governance of Selected Coastal Communities in Pangasinan*, came out of her interest in the notions of empowerment and participation that reside among community-based people's organizations in her hometown.
- Angelito Meneses (2016) has been a community development practitioner whose years of practice working in Aeta communities were the source of inspiration for his dissertation, *Kahampatan as Lived by the Ayta: Affirming Indigenous Well-being*.

Personal advocacy or research interest is another source of dissertation topics for the following graduates:

- Nathalie Verceles' (2014) topic in her dissertation, *Livelihood Practices of Women in the Informal Economy: Forging Pathways Towards Feminist Solidarity Economy*, was inspired by her continuing advocacy in making a difference in the lives of grassroots women in the informal economy. Her exposure to the women in this sector started when she did fieldwork as a student in Women and Development and her interest in her topic was also inspired by her advocacy on solidarity economy.
- Rowena Laguilles-Timog (2018) has an interest in housing that has produced research papers published in journals and presented in conferences; and her dissertation, *Organized Women's Responses to Urban Poor Housing: Towards Transformations in Housing in the Philippines*, was one of her major research studies on housing.

#### ***D. Research Methodologies and Data Gathering Methods Used***

Most of the research studies used the qualitative research approach such as feminist research, descriptive case analysis, participatory action research, and ethnography. For research methods, the authors combined more than one data gathering method such as: case studies, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, documents review, participant observation, life story and narratives, and focus group discussions. Immersion in communities was another method used by some to fully understand the processes and dynamics in the communities

under study—commonly done by those with community organizing-community development (CO-CD) orientations or who were development practitioners themselves.

Of the 13 dissertations, seven employed mixed methods – qualitative and quantitative methods – of which the quantitative used surveys and statistical analyses such as inferential statistics and descriptive statistics. In addition, four of these were feminist research studies – adopting feminist perspectives, processes, values, and ethics.

In terms of sample size, the 13 studies used small samples of research respondents, sample organizations, or sample communities. Although the studies of Columna-Tongson (2019) and Abenir (2014) utilized secondary data from large national surveys as backdrops of the conditions of their study respondents, all the studies are considered micro studies. As such, each study only provided the reality in a specific setting.

### *E. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks*

All the dissertations explored various SD theories, perspectives, and concepts to frame the topics under study. These theories – human rights-based approach, capability approach, human development, social relations approach, feminist grounded theory, standpoint feminism, systems theory, Third World feminist theory, inclusive development, feminist solidarity economics and ecology, development as freedom, and feminist intersectionality – as well as concepts – transnationalism, social capital, restorative justice, gender and development (GAD), participation, inclusion, citizen participation, community governance, empowerment, agency, capacity and community-building, indigenous knowledge, flourishing, and sandwich generation – provide the analytical handles of the dissertations under study.

### *F. Research Outputs*

Based on the observations made on the 13 dissertations, the research outputs may be categorized as follows:

#### *1. Current conditions of specific groups.*

Organized women (Laguilles-Timog, 2018; Verceles, 2014), unorganized women (Columna-Tongson, 2019; Villamor-Barrameda, 2015), humanitarian workers (Paez-Beltejar, 2015), and inmates (Rueda-Acosta, 2015) in various settings.

*2. Initiatives in theorizing from practice, consequently developing frameworks, models, and tools.*

Abenir (2014), for instance, proposed a framework focusing on five specific rights and three capabilities that could enhance the capabilities of children of OFWs to mitigate the social cost of migration. In like manner, Meneses (2016) and Will (2014) formulated indigenous models of the good life and well-being from the perspectives of indigenous peoples – the Ayta of Zambales and the Yakan of Basilan, respectively. Le (2015) proposed a model for inclusion of internal migrants through SD processes – people's participation, capacity building, and community building – in improving the quality of life of internal migrants within a socialist welfare state. Will (2014) also identified indicators in assessing the good life in combination with rights obligations that could be a tool for the flourishing of a particular group, whether in a conflict situation or not.

*3. SD processes and strategies in different settings.*

The study of Carolino (2016) highlighted participation, sense of ownership, and empowerment as elements in community governance in coastal communities. On the other hand, the study of Dumaraos (2014) underscored the elements needed in sustaining citizens' participation within the local governance mechanisms, while Pham's (2014) study highlighted the application of social enterprise as a SD strategy by civil society organizations in the context of a socialist central economy.

*4. Applications of existing theories, concepts and approaches.*

The studies of Columna-Tongson (2019), Laguilles-Timog (2018), Villamor-Barrameda (2015), and Verceles (2014) used the social relations approach (SRA) in various SD concerns – sandwich generation, urban poor housing system, disasters, and informal economy, respectively. Likewise, Paez-Beltejar (2015) adopted the UNIASC guidelines for mental health as the standard measurement for assessing psychosocial support for humanitarian workers, while Villamor-Barrameda (2015) applied major principles of human rights – participation, anti-discrimination, transparency, humaneness, empowerment, and rule of law – as indicators to determine the rights-based responsiveness of DRR programs of local government units.

Despite differences in many aspects, the studies had a common trajectory contributing to policy development and policy reforms. It

was also observed that the studies had varied depths of analysis. Some studies were limited to descriptions of current conditions, SD processes, and strategies; while others, particularly those that adopted the feminist perspectives, showed the intersections of two or more axes of difference such as gender, class, age, identity, and disability.

It may be posited that the 13 dissertations were a microcosm of the current SD issues, presenting a comprehensive understanding of critical and pressing social problems. Although these SD dissertations were micro studies and therefore cannot provide generalizations of the phenomena being examined, these studies represent the realities of the poor, marginalized, and/or disadvantaged sectors in Philippine society. They cited specific challenges to current SD research and practice as a means of enriching understanding on the emerging knowledge and experience on SD. Likewise, these studies showed the applications of various SD strategies and processes in various settings.

#### **IV. Trends of SD Research**

Two major trends are evident: one, the defining features of DSD research, and two, knowledge and meaning-making initiatives.

##### *1. Features of DSD Research*

The dissertations vary in perspectives, depth of analysis, approaches, and methodologies. Based on features, two salient points can be identified:

- *A clear standpoint and bias for the poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged groups and communities.* Drawing from Paolo Freire's ideas, knowledge and learning can never be neutral. As such, these could either change or preserve the status quo. Research studies as sources of knowledge are not immune to being located in either position. A clear standpoint and bias for the poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged sectors in our society are reflected in the DSD research studies. This can be observed in the choice of topics, sectors, research settings, and the goal of transforming the lives of the subjects of study. The studies did not only show interest in generating knowledge from the lived experiences of these people, but looked at realities from their own perspectives as well.

The dissertations were conducted not only as academic requirements but, more so, as a means to effect changes in the lives of the

poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged:

- Use of the research results by organized grassroots groups and organizations in their advocacy work in claiming rights of children of OFWs (Abenir, 2014), in improving housing and upholding the right to decent housing (Laguilles-Timog, 2018), and in improving lives of women in the informal economy (Verceles, 2014);
  - Advocacy within the authors' organizations and institutions in developing policies for the support of humanitarian workers (Paez-Beltejar, 2015), improvement of inmates' conditions (Rueda-Acosta, 2015), and enhancement of mechanisms for the full participation of farmers and fisherfolk in local governance (Dumaraos, 2014);
  - Advocacy and basis for dialogues with local and national governments about the post-disaster conditions of poor and unorganized rural women (Villamor-Barrameda, 2015), mechanisms for the inclusion of internal migrants in development processes in a socialist State (Le, 2015), and the importance of social enterprises in the economic development within a socialist welfare society (Pham, 2014);
  - Affirmation of indigenous knowledge on well-being and the good life as alternative models to the dominant Western models (Will, 2014; Meneses, 2016);
  - Provision of information as a basis for education, consciousness-raising, and planning to enhance the participation of fisherfolk in local governance (Carolino, 2016) and to improve the conditions of urban poor women in the sandwich generation (Columna-Tongson, 2019).
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- *Privileging the voices and perspectives of the research participants.* The poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged have found themselves excluded from the development discourse and from the development planning and policy-making processes. These sectors were given prominence in the DSD dissertations. The research studies served as venues to hear their voices as well as their perspectives – their ways of making sense of the conditions they live in, their analysis of these lived conditions, their strategies in surmounting such conditions, and their agency in improving their lives. Likewise, ideas, perspectives, and the wisdom of the research participants were valued and acknowledged as legitimate knowledges. Further, they were regarded as people with agency



rather than victims of their own conditions. Most importantly, they were recognized as experts of their own experiences and conditions.

## *2. Knowledge and Meaning-making*

There were initiatives from the research studies to theorize from the ground as reflected in the development of frameworks, models, and tools as metrics in measuring SD elements, strategies, and processes. As results, concepts, and approaches were drawn out from the local knowledge and processes, Western concepts such as human rights and development were given new meanings. Among the major points gleaned from the dissertations in terms of knowledge construction are as follows:

- Community organizing-community development (CO-CD) is the crucial core element of SD in which community participation, citizens' governance, empowerment, capacity building, and community building are hinged;
- Feminist perspectives complement and enhance the SD perspective by examining and interrogating social institutions (i.e., family, community, organizations, the State, and market) as sites of power dynamics and contestations;
- The dissertations provided a learning platform for DSD students to engage in development discourse and grounded theorizing. The research participants were generally regarded as co-learners in the research process.

## **V. Concluding Notes**

Based on the lessons generated from the DSD research studies, the question, "What then is SD research?" remains a relevant concern. The following provides a summary of the points presented in the dissertations for reflection and possible sources of future research interest, and as a basis for social policy development and developing planning processes:

1. More in-depth analysis of SD strategies and processes as applied in different settings and situations;
2. Interrogating specific SD theories, combining the perspectives of both the grand theories and grounded theorizing; examining marked boundaries and dichotomies; and finding interconnections among different theoretical viewpoints.

3. The research methods used in the SD studies can be cases for students to analyze the methodologies used vis-à-vis the research questions. In addition, the combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods in some studies showed complementation rather than contradiction. The studies can also enhance the curriculum design of the course on statistics for SD practice, providing a better measure of SD indicators and setting of SD research parameters. The dissertations have significantly contributed to the application of statistics in processing and analyzing SD data, providing shape for the data presentation in the research studies.
4. Presentation of specific socio-political-cultural-economic contexts, as presented in two dissertations where the area of focus was Vietnam. Having local and international field study/visits as part of the DSD program has offered opportunities to broaden and deepen the understanding on different development contexts, given the varying cultural and eco-political structures. Thus, comparative studies also make a significant contribution to understanding the SD context of a sector, within a specified community/locality; and,
5. The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature of SD as an academic discipline. The research studies reflect the fusion of SD with the previous academic backgrounds of the researchers (i.e., anthropology, community development, law, philosophy, social work, women and development studies, home economics, theology, law), eventually enhancing and complementing the SD perspective. Aside from the academic backgrounds and experiences of the researchers, future SD dissertations can be further enriched by other disciplinary fields. As such, future doctoral students can be encouraged to take electives in other disciplines to further enhance the transdisciplinary character of SD as well as the intersectionality of SD issues and concerns.

Ten years of DSD research have generated knowledge and information about social development as these studies provided new perspectives in enhancing discourses on SD. Since SD concerns and issues are broad, these dissertations are already significant contributions. Considering the broad concerns of SD, the DSD program has complemented these research efforts with its own initiatives through symposia, fora and other activities, harnessing the knowledge and experiences of local SD experts to amplify the voices and perspectives of the poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged sectors in the development arena. And recognizing the challenges of studying other SD issues, especially in these unsettling times

of climate change, worsening mass poverty, violence, and authoritarian governance, future DSD students can take on these challenges to generate new research studies to sustain the relevance of SD as an academic discipline.

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