
TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT AT MSU PROBLEMS, PROSPECTS AND RESEARCH AGENDA¹

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If we look back 25 years into the history of research and development at Mindanao State University, we shall perhaps find that MSU has in a sense, "gone too far and yet too near." Indeed, more than one or two intriguing paradoxes can be stated about MSU's research and development, which we, the authors, propose to view in this paper with our own constructed lenses as "insiders." We must concede that while this present examination of the subject may be useful in providing a closeup of reality, it may also be faulted for being myopic. Our present position as authors may remind you of the folkloric character, Rip Van Winkle, who was said to have fallen asleep for 20 years. When he woke up, he was utterly bewildered to find that almost everything had changed beyond his recognition! He could not understand what had happened.

We prefer to think, however, that we are not Rip Van Winkle at this point of our awareness. Unlike him, we hope to view research and development, or R and D, at MSU with our eyes fully open -- that is, seeing them under the premise that much had, or would have, occurred over the last two and a half decades.

As we reflect upon events, we find that there is much more to see about the how or why of R and D. For example, we realize that research, that function of the University to seek new knowledge or rediscover existing ones, is also a philosophy and a means to achieve a higher purpose. Research is the distinguishing mark and *raison d'être* of a "true" university that should aim well beyond traditional pedagogy, transmitting knowledge and truth not just inside but also outside the classroom. Without it, a college

or university is no more than a "glorified high school," to use the words of Teodoro Agoncillo, when he spoke on the primacy of research. He added that research "is the medium through which a teacher becomes a scholar," meaning one who expresses his academic freedom through writing. In his usage, research and scholarship are synonyms but both imply more than mere intelligence. Says he:²

...I use the term "scholarship" to mean the learning and intellectual authority won through many years of devoted and dedicated research in any field or fields. Scholarship, therefore, implies long years of continuous study and research in an attempt to expand the horizon of knowledge. One becomes a scholar not by earning many degrees but through hard work, a work that is free from the interference of anybody. A many-degreed man is not ipso facto a scholar. He may be bright, but if he is lazy, or lacks initiative, imagination, patience, industry and of course creative intelligence, he cannot be a scholar. At best, he carries the dubious distinction of being a bright mediocrity.

In a university, of course, research is not and should never be a "vocation" or a cause to advance one's parochial views or interests that are made to masquerade under the cloak of academic freedom. Also important to remember is that research has its own consumers within and outside the academic circle. Lest we forget, the flowering of research also depends upon another public, the administrators, with whom the researcher haggles for support and from whose appreciation and understanding the proper climate of research springs in the university.

On purpose, MSU stands for and is committed to research no more than it promotes instruction. Perhaps, it is the only state university in the country today in which the object and subject of research are both codified. The research function is enshrined in its charter with a specific slant or bias, emphasizing the study of Filipino native culture. Any meaningful evaluation of the gains and losses of the University must, therefore, take this point as a

reference. The MSU of today is a product of many hands and minds. Aside from the indelible contributions of then Senator Domocao Alonto, acknowledged father and founder of the University, the late Senator Jose P. Laurel, a nationalist from Batangas, left an impress of authorship in the clause defining the task of MSU:

The said University shall primarily give professional and technical training, besides providing advance instruction in literature, philosophy, the sciences, and arts. More emphasis, however, shall be given in the teaching of Filipino native culture, arts, sciences, philosophy, and literature. Researches on these lines shall be undertaken by the University. (RA 1893, as amended, Section 2.)

The rationale for the teaching and the research of these subjects is that they are "necessary to implement the policy of the government in its desire to integrate the national minorities into the body politic" (Preamble, RA 1893, also in the *University Code*, Art. 3).

Little research in history indicates how closely this provision is correlated to that of the now defunct Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. This bureau had spelled out a nationalist framework, embodying, among other things, the policy of "integration" which later guided the establishment of the Commission on National Integration in 1957 and Mindanao State University at the heart of Lanao. For the record, the Bureau has as its task the following:³

[To] foster by all adequate means and in a systematic, rapid, and complete manner the moral, material, economic, social and political development of the regions inhabited by non-Christian Filipinos, always having in view the action of rendering permanent the mutual intelligence between and complete fusion of all the Christian and non-Christian elements populating the Province of the Archipelago.

Broad as the provision of the MSU Charter may seem, it is clear that its instructional programs were to be carried out with a nationalist vision toward integration. Such was in evidence from "mixed dormitory housing," teaching of native Philippine Culture, and mandatory taking of History 55 (History of the Philippine Muslims) as policies in the University. That concept also related to research with the creation of the Institute of Research for Filipino Culture. An assessment of the IFRC's thrust would reveal that it bore some resemblance to the modern version of R and D, as aptly stated in the First Annual Report of MSU (1962-63):

The University must be a research center for the upcoming agro-industrial development of the (Minsupala) region in order to keep it abreast with the advances in science and technology. It is a solemn obligation of the University to extend the frontiers of knowledge in all directions. It must conduct researches to bring scientific discoveries in the service of industries.

The R and D concept here might be in its seminal form, which is acceptably taken as an application of knowledge from research results for the development of the surrounding communities. But its definition is far wider. It implies reference to make a research activity or process useful beyond the academic confines of research along native culture, arts, philosophy, and literature, and along scientific and technological lines characteristic of the "hard" disciplines. One may conceptualize R and D in the social sciences and humanities, by, say, relating folklore with social change and development, making philosophy relevant to the needs of the common man, studying technological diffusion and adoption, evaluating impacts of development projects, and more.

That brief characterization of R and D is also its defining substance. More formally, in our social-science prism, it is a system of prediction or control (or both) of a phenomenon through scientific methods to help solve particular problems of society for the purpose of a common good or benefit.⁴The

predicting and controlling of a good phenomenon are conscious efforts to manipulate and direct results by trained scientists, usually under the sponsorship of a committed agency. We call R and D a system, besides viewing it as a process, because its effective implementation requires a coordinated program of activity, of teamwork between researchers and administrators, of working together among scientists. But more importantly, it is a well-defined plan of work defining the objectives, the means of attaining them, and the utilitarian goals for the outside community. That description more or less completes R and D.

In practice, however, the ideals of R and D leave much to be desired. Its essence as a utilitarian inquiry in the context of scientific approach falls short of what actually exists, notably the seeming preoccupation with "basic" research. The discrepancy is almost always unveiled in every conference on development, where practitioners and the common people indict the scientists for not coming out of their academic shells to lend their knowledge and expertise to the outside community. The researchers, on the other hand, retort to this indictment: "How can we apply our findings if the problem has not been adequately described or understood? How can we utilize the research data if their predictive qualities do not rest on solid grounds? Implementation is not our job, we only inform and prescribe. Someone else has to undertake that task."

All these retorts are well taken, just as the lamentations of the ordinary people are equally valid: Research findings have to be utilized to advantage. But first, they must be more or less "perfected" and found adaptable to various regions, or else the facile transfer of technology becomes questionable.

Meanwhile, experiments have serially led to other experiments -- testing, refining, and producing technologies that have stayed very long in the laboratory rooms rather than in the fields where their results are awaited. Many of them were eventually applied some are successful, some are not. So many things "miraculous" or "instant" have been discovered: miracle rice, miracle corn, miracle fish, instant coffee, instant election, etc. Some of them have been helpful, but others are not, as their

adoption has only made some people worse off than before. On this score, the lessons of experience echo louder than the wisdom of the book.

Mere adoption and transfer can also spell forebodings rather than improvements, especially so if existing realities in the adopter's makeup are set aside. When some countries have decided to go nuclear, that technology, no matter how beneficial, cannot become the order of the day with poor nations. We need not talk of the Bataan nuclear debacle (fiasco, as others term it) to drive the point home. Another experience is the wholesale importation of Western technologies in electronics and manufacturing industries. It has created the so-called "dependency syndrome" in which the major beneficiary appears to be the sender rather than the receiver.⁵ It has led to what nationalists regard as "exploitation" of Filipino labor and subservience to those who hold the key to these technologies. We recall a similar case when a group of scientists from UP "nailed the NSDB (now DOST) to the cross" on the charge that it dwelled too much on the peripheral and secondary innovations in disregard of available capability among Filipino scientists to do much more than mere assembling and packaging other people's discoveries.

If these dilemmas occur, it is because R and D are hampered by one or more of these problems:

1. The inability to make sufficient distinction between "basic" and "applied" research;
2. The lack of communication between researchers and administrators, resulting in bureaucratic red tapes, misunderstandings, etc.;
3. The lack of administrative support, or its lopsided support given to other projects, leading to a distortion of development priorities;
4. The lack of funds for R and D, or its perceived lack of importance relative to other activities; and

5. The lack of competently trained personnel, imbalance in their distribution, lack of research interest, or predominance of interest in fields other than research.

All of these obstacles to research and development could be proven wrong (or correct) in a particular organization. They are self-evident and require no further debate. Item number one, however, is a special case which we would like to consider briefly and its linkages with the other items. It seems that many people, especially non-researchers, hold a narrow view of research as a dichotomous activity of the basic versus the applied, of the pure versus the utilitarian research, of the theoretical versus the atheoretical, etc. Those who think this way are likely to make sweeping analyses and conclusions, and are prone to be ultracritical of certain researches as "valueless" from the standpoint of development. This misjudgment arises perhaps from an overzealous attitude to seek out only the extreme, especially the side of research application, without looking at the graduations in between.

It could very well be that this limited and parochial view is the result of people's training, if not of their attitude. Some, including researchers themselves, have developed or acquired a maelstrom of the Western, liberal tradition (or have misread its value), in which things, events and processes are said to be structured in rigid compartments. This is manifest in the dichotomy between scientists and social reformers, between teachers and students, between patrons and clients, etc., which obliterates the many and refined types along the way. Even so, they might have easily forgotten that research is also a process, a creative act passing through several stages rather than a quantum jump from one pole to the next. This is why an "evaluative" or "impact" research is taken literally as a scholarly act without application to the man-in-the-street. They have failed to recognize that research is also a synergistic enterprise, a systemic activity, which -- like a social organization with a complex division of labor -- demands complementation in the carrying out of a task until it is produced for the consumers. What if someone abdicates his job, or only performs it half-heartedly?

Quite possibly, too, the compartmentalized orientation may have given rise to the belief, or misjudgment, that research products in the social sciences "do not have any impact whatsoever," as one University official has declared without much thinking. Thus, we have the resulting misunderstanding between researchers and administrators, the consequent lack of administrative support to or appreciation for research, the imbalance in the distribution of research personnel, and more.

If we have dwelled at length on these problems, it is because we feel that much of the difficulty of developing and implementing or realizing a program of R and D has not been adequately defined and agreed upon. Everybody makes his or her own definition and may become convinced of the reality of such a definition. A W. I. Thomas long ago said: "If people perceive things as real, they are real in their consequences."

In the University, the concept of R and D is more than suggested and emphasized as a framework for the achievement of a broad goal, namely that of "integration." The task that remains for us is the operationalization of this concept, or its assessment as a "value" in itself. The Charter of MSU speaks very loudly and clearly on this respect.

Many years ago, the University was emboldened by the challenge to serve as a instrument for the badly needed social, economic and political improvements of the Minsupala region. It took that mandate to pursue a task along the grooves of integration, which was then the order of the day. To quote from the report of Dr. Antonio Isidro summarizing the eight-year achievements of MSU, one of its unique features (the first such feature to be listed) is that the University is a "social laboratory," an experiment in the integration between varied cultural communities separated by history, culture and development. In his words:

[MSU] is social laboratory in a natural setting designed as an experiment in cultural interchange between Muslims and Christians who, having been

segmented for four centuries of foreign rule, are now being forged toward national solidarity.

Today, 25 years after, we must ask: "What is the result of that experiment?" Or, "Is the experiment still around and working?" We should profit from the address of Education Secretary Lourdes Quisumbing during the recent Silver Jubilee celebration, when she raised relatively the same questions.⁶ She asked: "Is MSU faithful to its original mission?" But more provocatively, she pointed out: "What is MSU for if it cannot bring about cultural integration?"

To our minds, these questions spell out the research agenda for R and D. They are the focal points of any research for and in the University.

We are all witnesses to the ups and downs of the University and can say with certitude that the responses to the challenges have never wavered. Only the approaches have, or could have, changed. However, we are still confronted with these questions: Are these responses in keeping with the mission statement of MSU? Or, are they expressions in pursuit of a typical mission of a typical University elsewhere?

It is always tempting to reflect upon the events of old when we recount history. For sure, they are varied and intense, passionate and colorful. Among them, institution-building is perhaps the most visible.

We are reminded, for example, of one event because we are talking of R and D. It is that event that led to the growth of an institution for research and development, or so it seems, that has now equalled or surpassed the University itself. We refer to the SEAFDEC which was nursed by mother MSU, through IFRD as a launch pad, but which was permanently weaned away by an act which we popularly call "independence." This case is a fitting example of integration in the sense of "cultural borrowing," which is its good side. The bad side is that what has been borrowed has never been returned. Once we relished the joke that SEAFDEC is

a "Mindanao Technology" in the Visayas, just as Mindanao is aptly regarded as an "agricultural colony" of Luzon and the Visayas.

The joke on integration is made funnier when one examines related cases in institution-building. MSU Davao has been annexed to UP Davao. Much like SEAFDEC, it appeared to have been a 1st territory, by the symbolic meaning of integration as borrowing of cultural items. Now, we hear of similar rumors that a couple of external units are also allegedly contemplating to declare their own independence by the familiar process of self-determination. Meanwhile, there was a golden opportunity in Zamboanga where ZMSU could have planted its own flag to achieve excellence in the R and D of aquaculture, very much akin to that of IFRD. That opportunity turned from gold to stone. Also worthwhile looking into is Palawan. MSU does not seem to be felt there as an institution. Thus far, Palawan has been a less than significant participant in the grandiose, regional experiment of MSU. From 1966 to 1980, only a handful, actually less than four dozen students from that province, have come to MSU for the cup of honey from the well of integration. Dr. Ali Macawaris reported that MSU students from Palawan registered a paltry 42 graduates, only a step higher than the "lowest" turnout province (Surigao del Sur) from the MINSUPALA region.⁷ Perhaps, the "low" turnout from Palawan is an account of its physical distance from Marawi City. Quite possibly, too, Palawan has but little realization of the opportunities for student scholarship that are open to those who reside in the Southern Philippines.

These experiences in institution building bear examining in light of the policy of integration which the University is too proud to tell and perhaps is too generous to share. They call for an assessment of MSU's "gains r losses," and why they happen. Are these events part of what the Secretary implied to be the "darkness" that was MSU, or her allegorical statement of its "golden past" which "faded" and her future today into "silver?" Or, are they part of the light which glitters from gold?

Mention of the macro-level structures of integration is doubtless significant in the portrayal of the whole picture at MSU. Their consideration should form part of the research

agenda in the future. We would like to suggest, however, that a study be made of balance in institution building, which was (or should be) MSU's weapon for greatness, as a requisite of the grand mandate towards integration.

Right now, the acronym "MSU" stands for many things. By slip of the tongue, it called Maranao State University by some people, or more widely as Muslim State University. Joke or not, it strikes a vibrant chord in what may sound as a discordant tune in integration. One gets this feeling when he stays long enough outside of MSU in, say, the far flung areas of Sulu, Tawi-tawi and Palawan. On this score, the remarks of Dr. Samuel K. Tan on the disunity of the Muslim struggle may be relevant. Says he:⁸

The evident effect of division in the Muslim struggle is somewhat revealed in the way Muslim groups have been treated or have reacted to such treatment. The Lanao Muslims who were the first to withdraw from the struggle have been elevated to positions of prominence, power and prestige. They occupy key political positions, (and) *control the Only University created to promote Muslim integration--Mindanao State University...* The concentration or privileges, influence, and power in the hands of one Muslim groups has created suspicion and resentment on the part of other Muslim groups. [underlining supplied]

As a scholar, Tan is entitled to his observations or opinions. If he spoke of a reality that exists from subjective perceptions, MSU has to and should listen, or at least should do something. Perhaps, Tan saw the "tip of an iceberg" of which the larger part, when raised from submergence, would expose fully a failed expectancy, it was, of providing the largesse through education and appurtenances it entails. Whatever, the research

should make an enlightening study on MSU's role of integration and the possibility that it can (or cannot) be woven along the lines of development.

Meanwhile, there are current episodes all over the MSU system that form part of a "hidden" agenda for R and D, or on the concept of integration itself. A quick glance of the various campuses may confirm the existence of some ferment, although short of the violence that rocked MSU during its formative, incipient years. Are these shows of ferment indicative of tribal enmity, religious mistrust, political struggle, and such other problems as they have appeared in the old? Or, are these events simply a microcosm of the national malaise that was rejected and put asunder during the People Power Revolution at EDSA? When placed into proper perspective, isolated into parts, and carefully analyzed dispassionately, we are certain that results will lend practical knowledge according to the spirit of R and D. They are problems of a high order that must be explained - and resolved - before one talks of the minutiae of research. It is a truism in research that the creative mind cannot function well under a climate of conflict and disturbance.⁹

Talking now of the "inside" or the micros of research and development, two agenda are appropriate, namely and examination of the effects of the curriculum, and those of the peace and order. Other things equal, the curriculum bears upon an analysis of the "hidden" influence in shaping the thought process and worldviews of people. For sure, there are significant gains in the academe by virtue of some stress on what curriculum is important. That MSU has somehow produced topnotchers attest to the fact that its goals of producing quality education are somehow met. In a way, this singular achievement puts the University on the national map in recognition of academic excellence in certain areas, such as Engineering and Forestry. However, it seems necessary to verify whether the curriculum also significantly attends to the needs of the indigenous communities, especially the Muslims. More generally, an assessment of the impact of the curriculum would find more meaning in a survey or follow-up study of where the graduates go, and what contributions they make for the development of the region.

The second topic, the study of peace, is directly important not only to education and institutional development but also is helpful in establishing a climate for research. The deterioration of the peace, at least in many aspects of Mindanao, is at once a cause for the lack of enthusiasm to do research for obvious reasons. A bothered mind cannot be creative. Nevertheless, it is equally a truism that the question of peace is an agenda of highest order in the research process. If peace is considered a goal, or at least an instrument in laying the conditions for development, then it is a subject for research that should be addressed with more vigor. The raging social conflict in the south deserves to be studied as a matter of priority to set the tone for mutual understanding and peace. Several questions come to mind. Those of importance to research is how certain social arrangements in the traditional structure can be woven into the picture. How, for example, do the values of familism and kinship relate to the accepted norms of achieving peace, or development? What policies would measure up to the aspirations of the Muslims, especially in their desire to express the familiar cry for self-determination? How can diverse communities be reconciled, besides by means of integration, into a unified collective which thinks of a greater interest than its own vested rights?

There are no easy answers to these problems. It appears that the solutions will come a long way unless research handles them with an orientation to helping develop those for whom development is most needed.

Thus far, we have indicated pleadings for research and development rather than presented results of an assessment. We have done so purposely to direct attention to the fundamentals which should serve as guidelines to the research process.

Other voices have been echoed on the status and problems of research. From his paper, cited earlier, Dr. Ali G. Macawaris reports:¹⁰

Thus far, 178 research proposals from 1962 through 1979 have been supported by the University

Research Center. Total research funding from 1962 to fiscal year 1978-1979 was P176,809, which went to studies on Filipino culture and others bearing on integration policies: P540,812 was granted to development-oriented research: publication and reading material, laboratory manuals, monographs, etc. shared P99,580.

From this report, which is authoritative, one gleans several points. First is that, over the years, the funding level has been "low" in an absolute sense (P1.05 million for a period of 15 years). During the past six years, research has reached an annual average of P350,000 representing, in "gross" terms, URC's approved budget. (The actual, approved budget for research are: 1980, P350,000; 1981, P350,000; 1982, P350,000; 1983, P400,000, 1984, P360,000; 1985, P336,000.) Secondly, allocations for studies which are mandated by the Charter constitutes a relatively low item. And Thirdly, the "lions's share" of the budget goes t research and development projects. The last is perhaps heartening.

In conclusion, Dr. Macawaris outlined what he perceived as the main thrust and priorities of the University in research:¹¹

Research programs and subsidies should reflect high priority and attention on critical researches on food, health, energy, the environment and peace. Systems should be devised for the dissemination of critical research results. Outstanding researches of high practical value especially, but not exclusively, in the areas of food, health, energy, the environment and peace should be encouraged and correspondingly rewarded.

In the University, however, many of the problems are founded in the discrepancy between stated or approved goals and results. The University Research Center, for one, has suffered from a dilemma of not being able to utilize fully its allocation for research and publications due to some technical difficulty. Thus, in a report, the Dean of Research pointed out an aspect of this problem and proposed a solution, "that the annual allocation for research and publication be restored to the URC budget (where it could exercise control under the "cost center" concept) instead of incorporating it under the University lumpsum."¹² One concrete effect of the problem has found expression in the backlog of publications and the inevitable farming out of "small" amounts to those research proposals where they seem to appear somewhat "heavy" (e.g., masteral theses and doctoral dissertations).

The motivation for research is somewhat affected, although it certainly has not gone down but upward, judging from the number of proposals submitted every year. This situation was in sharp contrast during the early years, when few seized upon the opportunity of research. There was a time when the URC even went out of its usual ways, allocating research funds to the different colleges hoping to encourage the faculty to do research. But that did not bear fruits. Now, the situation has greatly changed. Although some members of the faculty are perceived as acting as if they were "apostates" of the functions they have sworn to perform, the large number have realized the importance of research as an avenue for professional growth and as an outlet for their academic freedom. More support, however, has to be delivered to them if only to provide balance in the academe favoring research. Such support has to come beyond the "material" rewards, but without forgetting the logistics as an accoutrement of such an activity. No lasting encouragement and reward could be better than creating the appropriate climate for research as a process and as a systematic program.

If the University has to make a new beginning, it certainly has to reflect upon the past and square with the problems that have confronted it as an institution. It cannot chart a destiny independent of its history and the avowed goals that stirred it into existence, unless these are no longer accepted today as valid

or important. But more crucial, perhaps, is the suggestion that before the University marches forward into another era, it must embark upon a considered process of internal assessment and self-renewal.

NOTES

1. Paper presented to the D. K. Villaluz Memorial Lecture Series, MSU-Institute of Fisheries Research and Development, Naawan, Misamis Oriental, January 21, 1987. At the time of the occasion, the authors were the Assistant Dean and Dean of Research, respectively, of Mindanao State University, Marawi City.
2. Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *Scholarship and the University*, Monograph No. 33 (Professorial Lecture), University of the Philippines Press, 1977.
3. Quoted from the *Report of the Governor General of the Philippine Islands, 1917* by Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983, p. 268.
4. See Armando F. Bonifacio and Manuel F. Bonifacio, "Science and Scientists in a Developing Society," unpub. mimeograph.
5. Cf. Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo, *Issues in the Philippine Electronics Industry: A Global Perspective*, Research Report No. 3, 1985, UP International Studies Institute of the Philippines.
6. See full text of her speech in *Mindanao Varsitarian*, Vol. V (June-November, 1986), pp. 3 & 9.
7. Ali G. Macawaris, "The Role of Mindanao State University in Unity and Development," pp. 186-202 in Luis Q. Lacar and Nagamura T. Moner (eds), *Madrasah Education in the*

***Philippines and its Role in National Integration.* Iligan City: Coordination Center for Research and Development, 1986.**

8. Samuel K. Tan, *Essays on the Filipino Muslims.* Marawi City: University Research Center, MSU, 1982, p. 79.

9. As we are writing this essay, an unfortunate incident struck fear among the campus residents on the campus in Marawi City when a young professor was brutally killed by unknown elements. Last year, about October, a similar case occurred.

10. Macawaris, "The Role of Mindanao State University in Unity and Development," p. 188.

11. Macawaris, "The Role of Mindanao State University in Unity and Development," p. 202.

12. "Ten Year Achievement Data, 1976-1985," by Dr. Mamitua Saber.

