ASSOCIATION OF FOUNDATIONS

50 YEARS SINCE 1972

FOUNDATIONS
BUILT ON STRENGTH

STRENGTH IS GOLD

50 years of the Association of Foundations







Message from the Chairperson and the President

A JOURNEY OF COMMITMENT

AS WE CELEBRATE five decades of the Association of Foundations, we stand at a moment that invites both reflection and renewal. Our history is rich with collaboration, innovation, and a shared commitment to advancing the common good—and it has laid the groundwork for what we can still achieve, together, in service of that mission.

Since its inception, AF has been guided by a clear and enduring mission: to strengthen its member organizations—building their capacities for good governance and social impact—so they can better serve the communities they work with. It has pursued this by bringing together diverse non-profits united by a common vision of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development. We have seized opportunities to enable and empower foundations to effectively deliver their programs and services in the best ways possible. Through collaboration, we have strengthened the practice of both philanthropy and development work in the Philippines, fostered a culture of accountability and good governance, and amplified the impact of our members' work in communities across the country.

This e-magazine reflects five decades of steadfast commitment to our network and civil society—and the richness of the journey that commitment has produced. It captures stories of partnership, innovation, and resilience. It also honors the leaders, institutions, and partners who have shaped AF and the broader Philippine NGO sector over the years.

Our commitment going forward is clear: to grow an ever more vibrant community of reputable foundations, deepening collaboration, embracing new approaches, and engaging stakeholders across sectors to advance equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development.

We are deeply grateful to our members, partners, and stakeholders who have walked this journey with us. It is your active participation and collaboration that have made AF what it is today, and that same collective strength fuels our future together. With a strong and growing membership, AF shall lead with vision, act with purpose, and harness the power of that collective to achieve meaningful change. *Sapagkat sa AF, ang Lakas ng Isa, Lakas ng Lahat!*

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COVER PHOTO
Through five decades, AF members have worked side by side with grassroots communities, igniting hope and driving meaningful change that transforms lives. (Photo courtesy of Jaime V. Ongpin Foundation, Inc.)

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A HISTORY OF STRENGTH

The evolution of foundation work and the Association of Foundations (AF)



Mangrove restoration in Siargao Island is a project of the Jaime V. Ongpin Foundation, Inc. and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

CHARITY, as a universal virtue, is as old as history itself; the voluntary sharing of the material or even the intangible to uplift others has been the foundation of many movements through history that have done life-saving good. But when did the idea of man helping fellow man progress from handouts, to something more institutionalized—and sustainable—in the long term? In other words, when did the oft-quoted line from a 19th-century novel, "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime," gain enough traction to become a global impetus?

As it turns out, outright, institutionalized charity may have come later to the Philippines as a value promoted by the Catholic Church, says a Civil Society Brief, *Overview of NGOs and Civil Society Philippines,* prepared by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2007, reviewing the roles of non-government organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). Prior to that, it was actually more often a two-way street: "The basis for civil society in the Philippines is provided by the Filipino concepts of *pakikipagkapwa* (holistic interaction with others) and *kapwa*, which means 'shared inner self.' In practice, in the Philippines, voluntary assistance or charity connotes an equal status between the provider of assistance and the recipient, which is embodied in the terms *damayan* (assistance of peers in periods of crisis) and *pagtutulungan* (mutual self-help)."

The distinction notwithstanding, the title of "oldest NGO in the Philippines" is still generally held by the Hospicio de San Jose, the Catholic children's welfare organization established in 1778, during the Spanish era in the Philippines. The ADB Brief mentions "more domestic organizations, such as the Asociacion de Damas Filipinas (organization of Filipino women) and the Catholic Women's Federation," which also worked for public welfare; in 1917, the Associated Charities of Manila was created expressly for fundraising for charitable and medical institutions. After World War II, volunteer welfare and civic groups were organized to take on the rebuilding of both damaged facilities and lives, aiding the displaced, the orphaned, and the elderly.

The ADB brief then moves from American NGOs such as the American Red Cross, to the farmers' and laborers' credit cooperatives of the 1920s, and the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement and the Jesuits' Institute of Social Order in the 1950s. This decade, writes development expert Raul P. Gonzalez in *Searching for Renewed Relevance: Philippine NGOs in the 21st Century,* published by the Association of Foundations (AF) in 2005, "saw



Celebrating Children's Month with community activities

the emergence of the 'community development' approach...which provided a package of health, education, and socio-economic services to poor rural communities." The fact that it was "pioneering Catholic social action efforts" that carried this approach into the next decade, the 1960s, Gonzalez says, may speak of the fundamentally charity-based motivation of such work.

During the Marcos years, NGOs worked closely with communities, as a means to reach the poor, as well as a venue for anti-government activism. Gonzalez calls this "issue-based community organizing...also conducted under the protective cloak of church-based social programs." Later, secular NGOs established by activists would seek to mainstream their efforts in social development outside the church, empowering people through cooperatives and the provision of capital for small-scale entrepreneurship. Philanthropy and helping out began to adapt greater structure and system in a time of suffering.

As Alan Alegre, editor of *Trends and Traditions, Challenges and Choices: A Strategic Study of Philippine NGOs,* wrote of this era in 1996, the "intersection of three efforts—the church reaching out, the growing needs of POs (people's organizations), and the development concerns of secular NGOs—gave birth to creative programs that showed NGOs coping amidst repression." In other words, they pursued relevance and greater effectivity by engaging in "development work" to somehow give Filipinos better lives.

In his piece on *Doing Good and Being Good: Aspects of Development NGO Governance in the Philippines,* published in the University of the Philippines' *Public Policy* in 2002, Fernando Aldaba sought to describe the world that the modern Philippine NGO inhabits, as the eternal conduit between the people and the powers that be. "The civil society sector in the Philippines consists of organizations that lie between the state and the market. They are neither government institutions nor businesses and private enterprises...NGOs are a sub-category of civil society organizations and include civic organizations, charitable institutions and foundations, faith-based organizations, and grassroots and community associations." Development NGOs, in particular, "are guided by a vision and mission towards societal good,





(Top) Former AF Chair Gisela Tiongson (right) at an AF forum in 2022; (above) a team-building activity for a leadership workshop in 2011

particularly social and human development."

Consequently, these organizations themselves are held to a high standard, Aldaba says: "Good governance advocacy is not only meant for government and the corporate sector. Because development NGOs have charitable and noble missions, good governance must be a practice at all times. 'Doing good must always be matched by being good.'"

In an article published in the *Manila Bulletin* on Jan. 25, 2024, Jude Trinidad, a volunteer evaluator of the Philippine Council for NGO Certification, called NGOs "the third estate in nation building." "In a perfect society, public and private sectors will be efficiently distributing wealth equitably and providing inclusive services sufficiently. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would not even have to exist."

Unfortunately, this was just a "utopia," Trinidad writes. "In a developing country like the Philippines, the gaps in wealth distribution and inclusive services are more pronounced. NGOs, therefore, play a vital role in community



The spirit of 'bayanihan' or brotherhood is the basis for many acts of philanthropy in the Philippines.

mobilization, and in national economic and social development."

An NGO itself, Childhope Philippines, describes NGOs, simply and clearly, as primarily volunteer organizations "usually not affiliated with any government body. They aim to provide assistance, help a cause, and advocate a policy. In addition, NGOs across the globe vary in size, scope, and approach. However, they share a common principle—when people work together, we can change the world."

CSR or NGO?

A term that has come into use today, corporate social responsibility (CSR), later evolved to describe the work of larger NGOs often affiliated with corporations. It was coined in the United States in the 1950s, defined by author Howard R. Bowen as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society."

It's not quite the same context here in the Philippines, or even in Asia, for that matter, posits an economy paper on *Corporate Social Responsibility in the APEC Region,* prepared in 2005 by the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) Ramon V. del Rosario (RVR) Center for Corporate Responsibility. Similar to the relationship of equals and mutual aid seen in the ADB brief, the AIM paper cites the findings of Ma. Gisela Velasco of the Center for the Study of Philanthropy at the City University of New York, that "the notion of philanthropy and concern for humanity form part of the Asian psyche.

"In the Philippines, mutual aid is manifested in rural traditional communities. For example, the spirit of *'bayanihan'* (a Philippine tradition which entails 'brotherhood') is exemplified in the lending of mutual assistance. It is rooted in a deep sense of mutual respect." In other words, perhaps it's a natural, cultural predilection, long rooted in Philippine history, that makes it easier for bigger entities to factor in those who have less—without necessarily seeing them as such.

The AIM paper states it succinctly: "Businesses need to do good to do good in business." It further quotes the late Philippine

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Dinky Soliman, a giant of the NGO sector: "CSR is the soul of capitalism. It makes corporations aware of the fact that doing business is not just the bottom line."

Indeed, as Gonzalez writes in *Searching for Renewed Relevance*, CSR's association with big corporate money has sometimes left organizations wary of the term. "Some NGOs shy away from corporate foundations for fear that they will be used to divert attention away from (or worse, legitimize) the excesses of the corporate sector. There is some validity for this concern in the Philippines because of the huge income disparities between the rich and the poor, the high concentration of wealth in a few families, and the continuing manipulation by economic elites of an already weak state apparatus for their own ends." Gonzalez does posit, however, that corporate foundations "can be models for operating NGOs who are under pressure from donors and government to become more accountable, transparent, and adopt good governance practices."

Gonzalez lists down the many accomplishments of Philippine NGOs, particularly since the milestone of the 1986 EDSA Revolution. These include the organizations' role in shaping government policy in the fields of agrarian reform, indigenous people's rights, gender equality, community resource management, and more. Because of their work over the last 30 years or so at the grassroots level, NGOs have helped increase the number of people's organizations among the poor, empowering them to make their own decisions.

There is microfinancing, what Gonzalez calls "the distinctive NGO success story of the era," which has also led to social enterprises "contributing to socially inclusive wealth creation." NGOs have likewise significantly improved the status of women all over the country, from the top down; a 2001 study by AF revealed that there were more female executive directors running foundations than males, while rural women have been increasingly involved in community projects and activities, often ensuring an endeavor's success. Finally, donors are still willing to work with NGOs.

Moving forward, Gonzalez suggests priorities for NGOs, such as rethinking the community organizing framework, learning to build better alliances, coming up with more effective community-based economic projects, having a clearer grasp of larger economic issues, engaging with donors and clarifying funding issues—and that trickiest of undertakings, navigating the country's omnipresent and polarizing political arenas.

The last two decades have indeed seen the NGO sector growing by leaps and bounds in the Philippines. It now also carries the imprimatur of legislation. The 1987 Philippine Constitution reads, in Article II, Section 23: "The state shall encourage non-governmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation." Article XIII, Section 15 continues: "The state shall respect the role of independent people's organizations to enable the people to pursue and protect, within the democratic framework, their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means."

The AIM study identified three organizations that arose in the 1970s to help advocate for more compassionate, responsible business for a truly genuine application of CSR. These were the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference (BBC), founded in 1971 and now known as the BBC for Human Development; Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), established 1970 with the vision of leading business and industry's advocacies for poverty reduction in the Philippines; and the Association of Foundations (AF), established in 1972.

The last two decades have seen the NGO sector growing by leaps and bounds in the Philippines. It now also carries the imprimatur of legislation.

"Yes, the term 'CSR' was really used here only around the 1990s, relatively recent," explains Oman Jiao, Executive Director of AF, who joined the association in that role in 1999, as he clarified the occasionally blurry distinction between NGO work and CSR efforts. "Everything else that we were doing was labeled according to the field: education, health, livelihood, thematic areas."



AF Executive Director Oman Jiao

When CSR came in, it became the preferred term for corporate foundations, involving grants and funding. NGOs are still not cut-and-dried, however, and their programs are often named according to their focus. The solution, Jiao says, in the accommodating way that has come to characterize the approach of AF, was "to allow them to define whatever it is that they do."

That role has, over the decades, helped make AF what it is today: the biggest network of NGOs in the Philippines, with 267 members as of 2025. This includes 182 from the National Capital Region, 29 from Luzon, 25 from the Visayas, and 22 from Mindanao. The name notwithstanding, the organization has been open to all non-stock and not-for-profit groups, and NGOs and foundations are certainly part of that network, Jiao assures. "The other thinking is that they have to have a family name or corporate name as a foundation before they can actually join AF. They don't."

Today, AF runs four main programs. Membership handles recruitment and onboarding, performance management, and member development and support. Capacity Building covers AF's flagship Leaders Empowered and Dedicated to Serve through the NGO Sector (LEAD to Serve) Programs, a year-long comprehensive version as well as a two-month syllabus on project management, as well as other learning sessions. Collaboration has AF serving as a hub for interactions, a secretariat for cooperative platforms, a representative of member foundations in national and international coalitions, and a partner of government and national agencies. Finally, under Strategic Communications and Knowledge Management, AF manages various communication programs and produces knowledge products.

In 2024, according to the association's annual Network Aggregate Report (NAR), AF members contributed a total of P14.8 billion to various development initiatives in the country. In terms of distribution, the biggest chunk went to health and

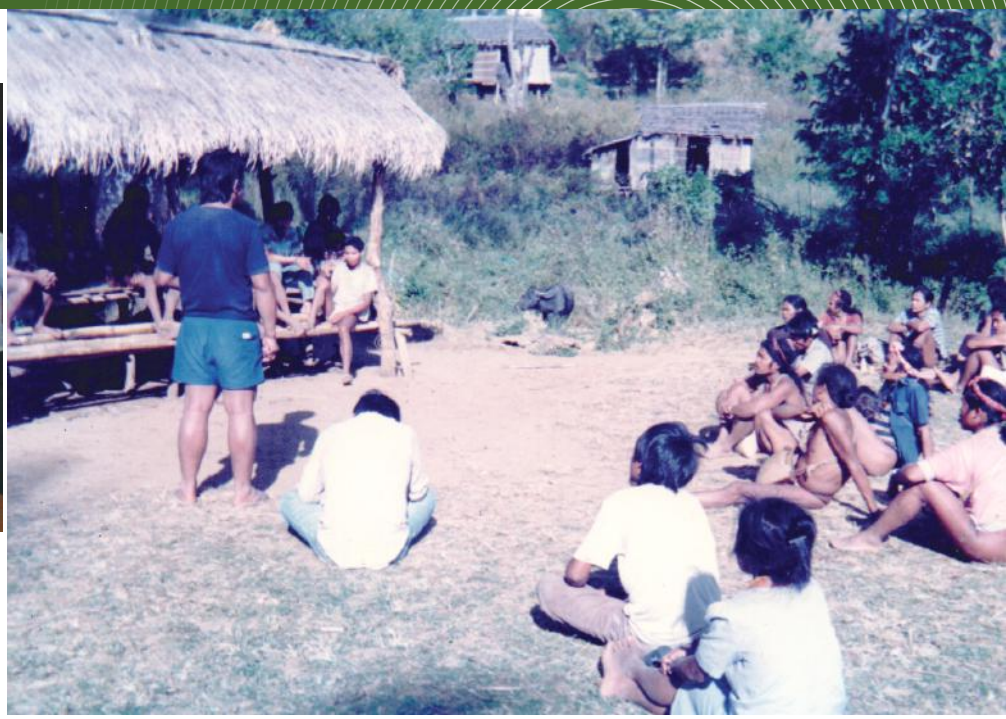




(Left) A LEAD to Serve groupwork in session; (above) AF's 40th anniversary commemorative publication



AF's former Board of Trustees with guests; (right, top to bottom) AF members at work in communities, including among indigenous people, in the organization's early days







nutrition at P4.5 billion, followed by education at P3.1 billion and capacity building at P1.1 billion. Some 50 to 70 percent of members focused their work on these top three fields. Other areas of work for members have been children's welfare, corporate social responsibility, disaster risk reduction and management, livelihood, climate change, and emergency response. An estimated 40 percent of the members collaborated on projects.

These efforts have reached some 41 million Filipinos, or about 19.1 million individuals in 5.4 million households. They have also reached various nano and social enterprises, civil service organizations, schools, and local government units (LGUs). The biggest number of AF members come from the National Capitol Region, followed by Calabarzon and Region 3, Central Luzon. They have also been making headway in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where there are currently 32 members implementing their programs in the area. Over 40,000 people work with AF member foundations today. ■

Building from the beginning: AF's early days



Founding member Lolita Delgado-Fansler at AF's 50th anniversary event

IT WAS THE SHEER LACK of any information or templates on running a foundation that led Lolita Delgado-Fansler, the only surviving founder of AF, to figure out where to learn. She went to the National Science Development Board (NSDB), predecessor of the Department of Science and Technology, then headed by Juan Salcedo, for the list of tax-exempt foundations and their heads, and asked her father, industrialist and business leader Antonio C. Delgado, to indicate who among the names heading these foundations would be good to interview.

"Then I realized that while these men knew each other only because they were presidents of corporations or universities," Delgado-Fansler says, "but they didn't talk to each other about their foundations. Like my father, they had assistants to help them comply with NSDB requirements, and to Dr. Salcedo's credit, he broadened the definition of Science to include education, the social sciences, and development work."

Later, she was invited to a Council on Foundations assembly in the United States, and came back with the goal of getting Filipinos to "talk foundation talk." What she was doing was the equivalent of what is now commonly known as networking, defined by fundsforngos.org as connecting to "share knowledge, collaborate on projects, and amplify impact through collective efforts," as well as counterpart funding, when the beneficiary must put up part of the total project requirement, in cash or kind, to secure the total grant. Both were concepts that had no names at the time. "If we know each other's work, and a project is not within our scope of interest, we can refer the proposal to the appropriate foundation."

There was even an early version of skills training and capability building, Delgado-Fansler adds, such as when she'd find a resource person to lecture on how to write or evaluate project proposals. She would normally host such meetings, or ask other foundations to do the same.

This was when she saw that most of the foundations were not grant-makers, but were looking for funds to support their projects. After about "two or three years of just getting together and learning from each other," the group was formalized in 1972 as the Association of Foundations (AF).

The original articles of incorporation of the Association of Foundations Phils., Inc. were signed at the Securities and Exchange Commission on December 11, 1972, with its purposes enumerated as follow: "1. To promote cooperation among member foundations and to improve planning and coordination in order that available

resources will have optimum impact; 2. To serve as a 'clearing house,' and as far as practicable, to provide members with the capabilities of shared professional staff to assist in grant-making activities; 3. To provide members with a broad range of information on foundations, in general, and to this end to establish, maintain, and operate a central file of foundation materials and prepare a directory of Philippine foundations; 4. To foster a broader public understanding of the nature of the work of foundations, thus paving the way for the growth and acceptance of foundations as institutions in nation-building; 5. To formulate a Code of Ethics for members and to encourage their professionalization; 6. To serve as a coordinating body to meet common problems and to act as spokesman of members whenever necessary."

Listed incorporators were Delgado-Fansler as President, Antonio R. Infante, Ernesto Aboitiz, Higino R. Francisco, Manuel Ylanan, Sixto Roxas III, Cesar N. Sarino, Armando Baltazar, and Bienvenido A. Tan Jr., with the last elected as AF's first Treasurer.

Delgado-Fansler was particularly interested in purpose no. 3, putting together a Philippine directory of foundations, because none existed. "Of course, people were so happy because they thought, aha, we're going to get a list of foundations we can ask money from," Delgado-Fansler notes—which was not going to happen, as the bulk of foundations then (as they are to this day) were operating foundations, which means they carried out and funded their own development work rather than giving away the money as grants.

'It was inclusive. You didn't have to be particularly rich or particularly big to be part of AF'

By asking each member corporation to assign a full-time person to its foundation's work, Delgado-Fansler unwittingly initiated the early incarnations of that NGO or foundation fixture, the project officer.

Delgado-Fansler doesn't recall the exact date, but only knows that before long, AF had grown simply because word of mouth drew inquiries from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. "So it was inclusive. You didn't have to be particularly rich or particularly big to be part of AF."

Most important, Delgado-Fansler says, were a foundation's sincerity and transparency. In fact, the NSDB considered an AF membership a good housekeeping seal. She recalls being told how a foundation associated with a controversial politician was fishing for an invitation to join the association. "Not a problem, I said, let's just show them the requirements for becoming a member, membership requirements, one of which was to open your books and have somebody audit you. We never heard from them again."

In 1988, Delgado-Fansler initiated the first environmental workshops among foundations and NGOs in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The goal was for them to review their projects with the intention of spotting areas where these could be detrimental to the environment. The results shocked many. In an attempt to increase the livelihood of poor communities, AF saw how providing pigs caused pollution of rivers, or providing local materials and instructions for women and children to make note cards resulted in piles of trash.

A foundation must also show flexibility to answer the needs of the time, as well as resiliency, Delgado-Fansler adds. She notes how, many years later, things significantly improved when Oman Jiao took over as Executive



Some of AF's newsletters, annual reports, and other publications through the years





(Far left) former AF President Patty Araneta; Araneta at a meeting (leftmost) with board members, including Judy Araneta Roxas (center)

Director, and when Judy Araneta Roxas, then chairperson of the Gerry Roxas Foundation, Inc., thought of approaching nine philanthropist friends to donate P1 million each to set up an endowment fund.

An ethos of philanthropy

Patricia Araneta, President of AF from 1991 to 1995 and Chair from 1995 to 1996, had been invited by Delgado-Fansler to join AF because Araneta's uncle, Father Francisco Araneta, was also an original member, having founded the Gregorio Araneta Social Development Foundation. "That was a characteristic of AF at the time," recalls Araneta. "It was mainly family-based foundations. The whole ethos, the whole philosophy, was philanthropy. They would really give and give. Nothing too corporate, they weren't managing development projects."

Delgado-Fansler had actually told Araneta to keep AF from getting "moribund"—"which was difficult for me to understand, because it had very good members," Araneta notes with a laugh. She would go on to represent AF in the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), a coalition born of consultations with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). CODE-NGO had been formed in May 1990 by the 10 largest NGO networks in the Philippines, and was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as a non-stock, non-profit organization in 1991. Araneta attended the first big meeting on the covenant for Philippine development NGOs in 2003. "The big question was, are all these foundations and NGOs doing what they should be doing? Were they just tax shelters or PR mechanisms? Maybe they weren't really helping who they were meant to help. And that's where I started learning about the different types of organizations that help with community development or nation building." Araneta was also involved in other NGOs like Green Forum, a community for sustainable economics, and Haribon, among the first environmental NGOs in the Philippines, having been established in 1972, which worked to conserve biodiversity and forests.

Araneta is proud of the significant fact that AF and the Philippines pioneered in moving in consensus with civil society and people's organizations. She recalls being in a meeting with parliamentarians in the Netherlands—"and when I told them that we consulted other members of civil society before we brought a position to the government counterpart, their jaws dropped!"

In a field with several organizations, the goal during her time was trying to establish and solidify AF's identity, Araneta says. "AF was among the oldest and more stable of these organizations, and it had the integrity that was reflected by its founders. It was an organization to look up to.

"But we were also quite diverse, with different interests. And we did a lot of networking with each other, so that really helped." People had different ideological leanings and values, and "there was always a bit of competition," she adds. "But in general, we were





A CODE-NGO trade event at Glorietta in Makati; (left) former AF Executive Director Angie Cunanan

all working for sustainable development for the country."

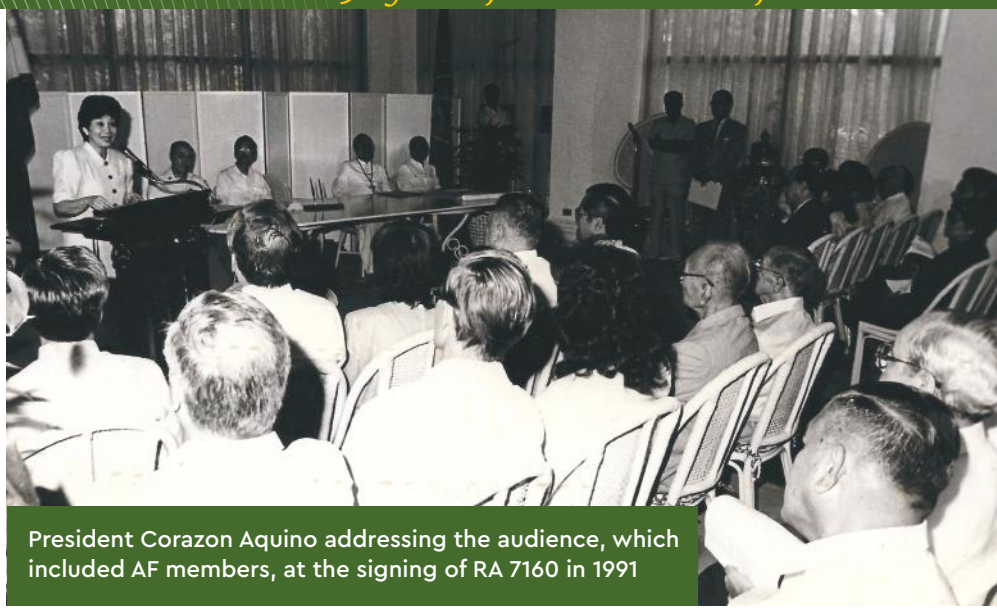
Araneta thinks foundations will still remain relevant in the Philippine setting. "Very much so, especially since the authorities who are supposed to be helping the people are not." In fact, Araneta co-founded the Mahalina Foundation in Calatagan, Batangas, which teaches mothers natural farming so they can feed their children, as well as weaving skills for additional livelihood. "Without the help of a foundation, they would not have been able to get together."

It was Araneta who recruited Angie Cunanan to become Executive Director of AF, a position the latter held from 1991 to 1995. Cunanan was teaching English literature at Assumption College, and had been recommended for the position by former Assumption President Sister Luz Emmanuel Soriano. Araneta was looking for someone to take over AF's daily concerns, although Cunanan still kept her part-time teaching schedule at the college. "All I knew then was that foundations should operate with a philanthropic, noble mission and vision," says Cunanan. "So it was not very far from my heart and my brain. With my age and with my experience, I always tell myself, never do anything that you do not like." Cunanan replaced Tita Ragragio, who opted to spend more time on environmental issues with Green Forum.

Cunanan states emphatically that AF's strength is in its diverse and knowledgeable members. "It's a balanced membership, in the sense that we're not left, we're not right. You cannot please all the people all the time, but we respect each other." She recalls a time when there was a debate over whether foundations should be allowed to keep cutting trees, as several member foundations had work that involved land clearing. They ultimately agreed on a solution: you cut, you plant. "That was acceptable to many. There was no fight. We could disagree, but it was diplomatic—deeper than diplomacy, because of respect for each other, because the members have visions. And as an Executive Director, I had to educate myself on that, even if there were times I wanted to express myself!"

Cunanan is also proud of how AF was "regionalized" during her time. Because it would be expensive to have all foundation heads come to meetings in Manila, every region elected a representative on the board. "Just like any birthing, it was difficult at first," she says. "The first step of a child is always difficult. But as the years went by, I thought it was something that made the members more active, and they understood what membership in AF was all about."

Cunanan considered herself a "learning Executive Director" who liked to listen to everyone. "When you are together, you will always listen to each one trying to explain what they are doing in their own foundation, in their own



President Corazon Aquino addressing the audience, which included AF members, at the signing of RA 7160 in 1991

communities." She remembers with a laugh how, in the days before active email, updates were sent by fax, or by courier services that only came once a week. "The good thing about their reports was, you would see what were the obstacles, what were the problems they encountered, which could be brought to the board. And as the Executive Director, I made a summary of these things so that the President or the Chair would be aware."

When Harry Abrillo of the Meralco Foundation took over as President, he commissioned his own group in Meralco to do a salary scale study for AF. The result was the necessary compensation adjustments, and for the first time, AF's few employees enjoyed a Christmas bonus. "I'm so proud of that," says Cunanan. "They were little things, a little money, but it came from the hearts of the members of the board."

NGOs and local government

A significant development at the beginning of Cunanan's stint was the signing into law by President Corazon Aquino of Republic Act 7160, "An Act Providing for a Local Government Code of 1991," on Oct. 10, 1991. A main feature of the code was decentralization and the autonomy of local government units (LGUs), which became responsible for delivering basic services to citizens. More important for AF, the role of NGOs was highlighted, as national agencies were required to consult with LGUs and NGOs before implementing any projects. NGOs would also have seats in various local governance bodies, including local development councils, health and school boards, peace and order councils, and even awards committees for infrastructure bidding.

The role of NGOs was highlighted, as national agencies were required to consult with LGUs and NGOs before implementing any projects

By February 1992, as recounted in the booklet *Nationwide Mechanism for NGO/PO Selection for Representation in Local Bodies,* published by AF in 1993, an "inter-network consultation on NGO participation in the implementation of the local government code" was held, where the structure of a National Coordinating Council (NCC) was proposed. The NCC was formalized with 23 network members. AF led the project, which the booklet was named after, meant to "launch an information campaign on the code, list existing NGOs and POs, and provide a mechanism for accreditation and selection."

The booklet lists many "firsts" for this project. The effort saw all these NGO networks working together; it consulted thousands of NGOs, from the national to the grassroots level; it strove to create a unified development agenda for all the NGOs and POs; it profiled all these organizations; it coordinated with LGUs and the private sector; it forged on despite difficulties and upheavals; and it provided a template for similar future activities.

Expectedly, many local leaders didn't like the idea of having NGOs looking over their shoulders, especially during potentially anomalous activities. Cunanan recalls going to a meeting with a hostile provincial governor and declaring, "Let it not be said that the local government code is just a piece of paper, or a law that was never implemented."

In 1996, the League of Corporate Foundations (LCF), a network of grant-making corporate foundations, was established, expressly to promote CSR practice in the country. It was considered a subsector of AF at the onset, with

Cunanan calling AF the "foster mother" of LCF.

In 1992, AF was chosen to host the United Nations Development Programme Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program (UNDP GEF-SGP) in the Philippines. In support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the SGP, according to the GEF website, is meant to "catalyze and mobilize civil society actors and local actions needed to address major drivers of environmental degradation and help deliver multiple benefits across the GEF's mandated thematic dimensions, while promoting sustainable development and improved livelihoods." This is done by providing financial and technical support to local civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), "with a special focus on Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth, to develop and implement innovative local actions that address global environmental issues, while also improving livelihoods and reducing poverty." Cunanan notes how the Philippines was one of only 22 countries where the program was started.

According to the AF Annual Report of 1994-1995, "The UNDP has cited the Philippines as relatively advanced in the implementation of the program." During the program's pilot phase, US$406,895 went to Philippine projects. One of these which Cunanan recalls was the Batanes Foundation, which received a grant for a solar power system to help Ivatan fishermen make ice to preserve their catch. The grants program has since been taken over by the local UNDP office.

In late 1994, working with the Ayala Foundation, the Evelio B. Javier Foundation, and the Center for Community Transformation, AF embarked on a P35-million program meant for public-private sector partnerships, Promoting Local Initiatives for Democracy and Justice (PRODEM). The program goals, according to the annual report, included "to enhance the capacities of local government units at the provincial, municipal, and barangay levels," as well as "to strengthen the capabilities of local networks, coalitions of non-government organizations, and people's organizations..." The three implementation sites were Laguna, Sarangani, and Misamis Oriental, with AF assigned to three municipalities in Misamis Oriental: Tagoloan, Villanueva, and Balicasag. Funding was provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).





(Above) An AF board meeting in 2001, as photographed for an official publication; (right) AF Chairperson Judy Araneta Roxas congratulating foundation members while AF President Marissa Camacho looks on





Rory Tolentino, former Executive Director of Ayala Foundation; (below) Tolentino's send-off after serving as an AF trustee

Before Judy Araneta-Roxas set up the large endowment fund of P1 million per benefactor, however, as Cunanan said, "The million pesos were preceded by P100,000." In her last year as Executive Director, during a meeting, Andres Soriano gave P100,000 as a donation for AF. Ayala gave another P100,000, Coca-Cola Foundation another, and other corporate leaders with member foundations followed. A million pesos was collected to add to AF's coffers. "When I went to the United States, I saw how endowments really work well," Cunanan says, "because you never can rely on funding from any one funding facility over so many years."

When Oman Jiao came on board as Executive Director in 1999, AF was already 27 years old, with around 100 members, 10 of them from the regions. After the new democracy of the 1986 EDSA Revolution, however, a lot of money came in for the Philippines from all over the world for NGO work, to the point that AF had regional desks in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao desk— "which, in the long run, turned out to be not sustainable," Jiao admits. "Because you had the money, that doesn't mean that you have the money forever." For the longest time, AF was run by just four people, but membership was still growing, primarily by word of mouth, even if there were no roadshows or campaigns, Jiao says. Also, surprisingly, there were no overlaps; foundations with projects in provincial areas somehow did not conflict or compete with groups already present in those areas. "It was courtesy, basically; I like to think they were talking to each other."

1. A founding member

Ayala Foundation, established in 1961 as the social development arm of the Ayala Group of Companies and formerly known as Filipinas Foundation, was a founding member of AF. "I think Ayala Foundation saw it as important, but I'm not sure it took advantage of being an AF member in the way that it could have, because it saw itself as being more corporate," says Rory Tolentino, Executive Director of Ayala Foundation from 1999 to 2002. Ayala Foundation was more focused on setting up the League of Corporate Foundations in 1996.

Although AF was still a small organization at the time, Ayala saw "the opportunity to get some sense of what different foundations and NGOs were doing," Tolentino says. "In the Philippines, they don't differentiate between foundations and civil society organizations. So it's all the same to government. So at that time, AF was one of the few groups, probably the only one, that was looking at creating a database of foundations and civil society organizations, which was helpful to all kinds of donors, including Ayala. I think that was the first set of activities for AF that mattered to the non-profit world."

For example, Tolentino illustrates, if a group wants to work in Laguna, AF can provide answers to questions like, who are the foundations and



Foundation representatives divided into cluster groups at an AF event

NGOs that work there? Where do they work? How can we partner with them? Meanwhile, Ayala brought "clout" to the table; "Ayala is Ayala, and that helped in AF becoming an identity." Tolentino was also an AF trustee during a critical time for AF. A trustee's work is two-fold, she explains: "First is governance, to make sure that your systems are intact, transparent, accountable. And the second is strategic thinking, looking at what the signs are telling you, where to move in the future. What is out there that we could take advantage of?"

The time was "critical," she adds, because "AF needed much more to be able to survive and to offer different kinds of services to its members. So in some ways, the criticalness was being able to bring in the principles of corporate foundations like Ayala to be able to give it a bit of an impetus, so that other corporate foundations could join."

Mario Deriquito, also a former Ayala Foundation executive and now President of the BDO Foundation, became an AF trustee in 2003. Aside from Ayala Foundation providing significant funding to AF, its capacity building committee, which Deriquito headed, developed and implemented programs that helped expand the skills and knowledge of AF members. "If you belong to a network, you gain access to information about what others are doing, because as a network, AF obtains and consolidates the information, then shares it back to the members," he says. "We gain knowledge about how much is being given by all the NGOs to national development, which is very useful information. Plus, it's also a venue for partnership building. We get to know all the members, where they are, and what they do. In case we have a program where we need partners on the ground, then we have the AF network to work with."

Today, AF describes itself in its vision as "a vibrant community of reputable foundations working together and engaging other stakeholders for equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development." Its mission: to "enhance members' capacities for good governance and social impact, and collaborate with other stakeholders to attain the development agenda of the Philippines."

While it ably represents its member foundations, Jiao is quite clear about how AF is in itself *not* a foundation. "The primary clients of AF are our members. In other words, we service our 267 members (number as of April 2026), wherever they may be. They are our primary clients and stakeholders. That's why we don't have major programs on the ground. We're not supposed to be seen as someone who has an education program, a health program, or a livelihood program. We're not out there."

It could be as simple as, say, a member foundation needing a resource person for a proposal writing workshop on a certain date. "AF will do it for them, but if the timing does not align, at the very least, I will find someone reliable who can do it for them."



A capacity-building workshop on understanding financial statements

Tolentino, who also used to chair CODE-NGO, says that after the organization became more "gun-shy" under the past administration, AF took on that mantle in the sense that as a membership organization, it's bigger than even CODE-NGO. But AF has kept under the radar politically, and that's probably what the members want it to do. Meanwhile, at the regional and local levels, where the members of AF are part of local development bodies, that's where they do a lot of the advocacy, because these are the issues that matter to the members."

2. Capacities and collaboration

The idea of service for members has taken the form of an important element today in foundation work: capacity building. "It's training, it's workshops, it's ensuring that they are practicing good governance, transparency, legitimacy, accountability," Tolentino says. "That means helping member foundations improve the way they do things, so that they can now do better in the communities that they are serving."

The idea of service for members has taken the form of an important element today in foundation work: capacity building

In the early days, this involved training in specific areas such as financial management, proposal writing, or resource mobilization, because these were the needed skills. Needs analysis was another important capability. NGOs also needed to work on such areas as reputation management, branding, marketing, and communications. "In other words, it is thinking of what an NGO needs to do their work better. That's what we're giving," says Jiao.

To the notion that foundations are sometimes just part of public relations and image building for big corporations, Jiao is pragmatic. "Of course there's still a photo-op, but there's also content. Today, they have to do things and report it. They need the evidence, and the sustainability."

Even the catchwords have evolved, Jiao notes, from the simple "profit, planet, people" of corporations, to CSR, and now, ESG (environment, social, governance).

"There are corporations that really seriously want to give back, and the Ayala group is like that," says Tolentino. "They've become involved in all kinds of issues that have to do with the country as a whole. Of course, many corporates do it as a way to boost their image, and Ayala is not separate from that. I think as corporations begin to expand their operations globally, they are much more interested in following the rules of the countries where they need to expand, and also boosting their image as good corporate citizens."

"We don't deny that part of the objective is, first of all, to bolster the image, especially of the

mother company," Deriquito adds. "But it's really not the primary objective now." Interestingly, he also shoots down the notion that a foundation is a tax shelter for corporations. If a company donates to a foundation, he explains, and the foundation is a certified donation institution, the donor company gets to deduct the total amount of donation from its taxable income—not from the taxes. "For example, if I am a company and I donate a million to a corporate foundation, I recover only about 30 percent of what I donated, P300,000 in terms of tax deduction. So it's a misconception that the million is covered."

As for sustainable development, it's simply reminding the members, "I hope you can continue the program that you are doing," Jiao says. "I hope it's not a one-time project. I hope it's not, when the donor funding stops, the project also stops. When it's said that this is what the project wants to achieve and to target and to have as an outcome, I hope it's true that there *is* an outcome."

Certain areas, as indicated in the NARs, have become more urgent or problematic in recent years, with foundations concentrating on areas they had previously not covered, such as disaster management and climate change.

Climate change, in fact, is one of three areas in which AF is working with other organizations, for the benefit of its members. AF's project Igniting Climate Action and Responsibility for the Environment (Project ICARE), which ran from November 2024 to October 2025, received support from the Worldwide Initiative for Grantmakers Support (WINGS) Lift Up Philanthropy Fund to develop the capacities and engagement of AF member NGOs and foundations in climate mitigation and adaptation, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goals 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 13 (Climate Action).

Another SDG, Goal 1 (No Poverty), is the driving force behind the Zero Extreme Poverty





AF secretariat dining with guests from Sasakawa Peace Foundation during an out-of-town workshop in 2007; (top) a meeting at the AF office in 2003



Gathering for AF's Project ICARE

Philippines 2030 (ZEP2030) Movement, now Zero Poverty 2030, launched in 2015 to make one million Filipino families self-sufficient by 2030. AF is one of 19 lead convenors for this effort, and shares secretariat duties with Philippine Business for Social Progress, Inc. (PBSP).

And then there is AF's flagship endeavor, Leaders Empowered and Dedicated to Serve through the NGO Sector (LEAD to Serve Program). After the 2017 "Study on Leadership Transition in the Philippine NGO Sector" conducted by AF confirmed the concern of foundation leaders about the lack of leadership succession in their organizations, three courses were created: the year-long LEAD to Serve Flagship Course; the LEAD to Serve Course in Local Governance, to enable graduates to engage with LGUs; and the two-month LEAD to Serve Basic Program Management Course.

Jiao calls LEAD to Serve their "succession program." It was created with a business model, with organizations paying a counterpart cost for the training. "There will be leaders who will eventually take over, and the ones who are succeeding retirees are graduates of LEAD to Serve," Jiao says. "That's something to be proud of. That's the dream, that eventually we will move out and the younger people will start coming in."

In a field considered by some as a "stepping stone" to more lucrative jobs, or where young workers move like" butterflies" flitting from one post to another, as Jiao describes it, he himself says, between the ages of 26 and 29. "These are the people who love their jobs and to some extent, just want a simple life, one of service, and succeed in the work that we do."

Deriquito agrees that the person who works in an NGO is *"hindi interesado sa pera* (not interested in money). It's a psychic reward." In his case, however, he discovered corporate foundations after joining corporations, such as in his stint with Mondragon Philippines, where he helped put up the Mondragon Foundation. "It's a middle ground where you get to enjoy the best of both worlds," he says.

Tolentino doesn't see such butterflies as a big problem. "Every person who's been through the NGO world and served in some capacity brings a perspective to any organization: What does the community think? Let's listen to the community. It may be a loss in terms of your numbers, but it's a gain in terms of being able to broaden the perspective to serve. That's a nice glass-half-full way of looking at it, like spreading that mindset to the corporate sector. That's the nature of the beast. Just keep training more people." ■





LEAD to Serve Batch 1 participants at their outcome evaluation; (right) the pilot LEAD to Serve batch

'Is that construction, makeup, or undergarments?'

Lolita Delgado-Fansler on the early days of foundation work in the Philippines



Delgado-Fansler: 'I can do a lot of good with this foundation'

It's interesting to know that the woman who spearheaded the establishment of the Association of Foundations might not have gotten around to doing it if she had been allowed to become a nun when she wanted to. Lolita Delgado had applied to the Maryknoll Motherhouse in New York, to enter in September of 1968. "So then I talked to this American nun who had been a beloved teacher," recalls the once aspiring novice, now Lolita Delgado-Fansler. "And she said, oh, don't enter in New York, enter in Manila." Unfortunately, the entrance date was the following month, which Delgado-Fansler was then not ready for—giving her a year to wait.

In the meantime, while in graduate school at the Ateneo de Manila University, Delgado-Fansler began reading the articles and by-laws of the Jose Antonio Delgado Memorial Foundation (JADMF), named after her younger brother, who died in 1963 along with 23 other boy scouts when their plane crashed on the way to the 11th World Scout Jamboree in Greece. Upon the advice of a Jesuit friend, the family used the insurance money to set up the foundation to help out disadvantaged youth. Delgado-Fansler accepted the job of becoming JADMF's first Executive Director when she realized, "I can do a lot of good with this foundation." At that time there was no formal training in foundation work offered by universities. "In fact, when friends would ask, 'What are you doing?' and I'd say, 'Oh, I do foundation work,' they would say, 'Oh, is that construction, make-up, or undergarments?'"

One of the first things she did was to add the trade name of Ala-Ala Foundation because JADMF was too long. "I also removed four Delgados from the board and replaced them with non- relatives; it just made sense to me," she recalls.

Other than learning from established institutions like the Ford Foundation, Asia Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation, who graciously lent her templates for evaluating and monitoring projects, Delgado-Fansler tapped her father's friends to bring foundation heads or representatives together. "I would invite people to lecture on things that I wanted to learn, so everyone else learned in the process. My goal was to get the group together so we learn from each other and become more professional." The Association of Foundations formally organized in 1972; clearly, one didn't have to become a nun or priest to serve God and country.

Today, Delgado-Fansler spends four months a year in the United States so her husband could be with his family. "I call it my Yin-Yang life, going from rural West Virginia to living eight months in urban Metro Manila." Being in the Philippines, she sits on several foundation boards, has become a published author and editor, and a is a promoter and lecturer on Mangyan script, poetry, and culture. "The psychic income one gets from doing foundation work is rewarding, because you are in the company of people who are trying to improve people's lives, instead of just complaining about where the country and the world are going." Another blessing is, after living in Europe, Asia, and the United States, her two sons have chosen to raise their own families in the Philippines. "I raised my kids to be proud of being Filipinos." ■

2 STRONGER TOGETHER

Chronicles of progress



A teambuilding exercise for a leadership workshop in 2011

A. Steady growth: AF's expanding ranks

IN 2019, AF started producing an annual Network Aggregate Report (NAR), gathering information from members between March and April, covering the past calendar year, to be reported at the annual General Assembly (GA) in May.

The first NAR, which represented 77 percent of the association's membership, reported an aggregate value of over P8.9 billion in development initiatives, supporting some 31 million Filipinos, primarily individual beneficiaries, along with families or households, schools, organizations, and local government units. AF was already present in all regions of the country, with 110 members contributing the biggest amount in the area of education (P2.2 billion), health and nutrition (P1.3 billion), and microfinance (P1.04 billion). These areas were followed by capacity building, children's welfare, and livelihood. Also, 45 percent of AF's members collaborated on various projects, in most cases with more than one partner. The number of AF members that implemented in the NCR was 80, followed by 73 in Calabarzon and 61 each in Central Luzon and Western Visayas. Northern Mindanao registered 53 members implementing, while Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and Gen. Santos City) registered 52 members implementing, with 29 members implementing in BARMM.

By 2020, with representation of membership rising to 82 percent, initiatives now hit some P10.5 billion in value, reaching approximately 70 million Filipinos—over double the previous year's figure—with priority areas in emergency response (P2.1 billion), health and nutrition (P1.8 billion), and education (P1.6 billion). The focus on emergency response and health and nutrition was perhaps because this was the year COVID-19 began to ravage the country. NGOs, cooperatives, and people's organizations, as well as national government agencies, were also assisted, most likely for COVID control and management efforts. Collaborations, however, fell to 38 percent, possibly because of the lack of opportunities for interaction during the lockdown. The number of AF members that implemented in the NCR was 87, followed by 75 in Calabarzon and 60 in Western Visayas. Down south, Northern Mindanao registered 49 members implementing, while Soccsksargen registered 46 members implementing, with BARMM counting 23.





(Top) Gathering for a Mindanao consultation in Davao; (above) AF trustees at a strategic planning session

In 2021, in the aftermath of the pandemic and the significant slowdown of business and public activities, the NAR (representing 85 percent of members) presented an aggregate value that rose to P13.4 billion from the previous year, but reached fewer Filipinos, about 35 million. Other than families, individuals, schools, and LGUs, this investment reached civil society organizations as well as businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) trying to get back on their feet. Unsurprisingly, with the more limited resources and COVID numbers still up, health and nutrition became the top consideration with P4.4 billion in member expenditures, followed by education (P2.5 billion) and emergency response (P1.2 billion, significantly less than the previous year, as well). Members also invested in capacity building (P700 million) and in microfinance, which fell to fifth place (P595 million). Members that implemented programs in the NCR went up to 100, increased to 79 in Calabarzon, 62 in the Negros Region, and 59 in Central Visayas. In Mindanao, members that implemented in Northern Mindanao increased to 54, increased to 50 in Soccsksargen, but went down to 22 in BARMM. The number of AF members working in collaboration with fellow members registered 67 percent.

Members that submitted their data for the 2022 NAR increased to 91 percent, with an aggregate investment of P15.8 billion in development initiatives. Health and nutrition took the lead as top program area (P5.9 billion), followed by education (P2.3 billion), and emergency response (P1.3 billion) as priorities, and approximately 48 million Filipinos reached, including thousands of civil society organizations and schools. A new entry was added to the top areas of expenditure: climate change, with 37 members putting P439 million into this domain of national development. Thirty-four percent of AF members collaborated on projects. NCR remained the top area of program implementation with 113 members present, followed by Calabarzon with 96 members carrying out programs, 76 in Western Visayas, and 74 in Central Luzon. Northern Mindanao remained a top area with 58 members implementing in the area, followed by 52 members in Davao. More members worked in BARMM, with 33 implementers registered in the area.

With the same percentage of representation in 2023, and a higher rate of collaboration at 36 percent, according to that year's NAR, P15.25 billion in expenditure reached 58 million beneficiaries, including a significantly higher number of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as social projects (251,629) and schools (246,378) nationwide. Other than into health and nutrition (P5.72 billion) and education (P2.72 billion), 118 AF members poured resources and efforts into capacity building (P1.06 billion)—an indication, perhaps, of the acknowledged need to develop the capabilities required to better manage work and resources, in a society forever changed by recent health and environmental crises. Areas with the biggest numbers of members that implemented their programs was the NCR with 134, Calabarzon with 109, and Western Visayas with 79. From north to south, there were 54 members from the Ilocos Region and 44 from the Cordilleras, 57 from Soccsksargen, and 56 in Davao.

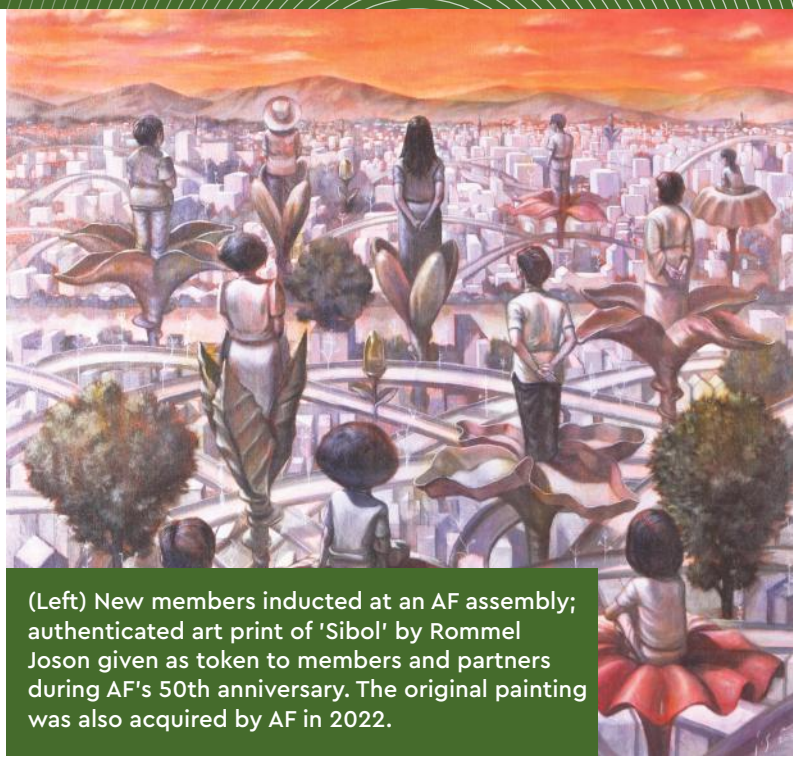
Membership in AF is open to private, non-stock, non-profit organizations whose trustees or officers do not receive income

1. Becoming a member

AF's Committee on Membership screens new applicants, monitors how its members perform, and supervises all membership activities. The membership policies and procedures are formulated by the Committee, and approved by the General Assembly (GA).

Membership in AF is open to private, non-stock, non-profit organizations whose trustees or officers do not receive income; thus, the organization must not have been created for the financial benefit of its founders or trustees. The organization must be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and its income primarily meant for social services and development and scientific, educational, and charitable work or activities serving the common welfare. In compliance with government requirements, administrative and overhead costs





(Left) New members inducted at an AF assembly; authenticated art print of 'Sibol' by Rommel Joson given as token to members and partners during AF's 50th anniversary. The original painting was also acquired by AF in 2022.

must not exceed 30 percent of the organization's total income for the fiscal year.

Other requirements for a working organization are a physical office space for business, and at least one working representative or staff. It should have a Board of Trustees composed of independent volunteers who set and monitor policies and regularly review these, along with the organization's programs. The organization should also have been in operation for at least a year at the time of application for membership.

The Membership Committee may assign applicants under two possible classifications of membership. Associate Members have been in active operation for between one and three years, or have passed the minimum requirements of AF application, but have activities which mainly involve internal operations, rather than serving an external beneficiary. Associate Members enjoy all member privileges, but cannot as yet vote for trustees. Associate Members can become Regular Members through the submission of a formal request letter, and will be assessed according to their compliance to AF's annual membership requirements including regular payment of dues and GA attendance, and up-to-date submissions of audited financial statements, general information sheets filed with the SEC, and data for the NAR. All these records go into the Member Scorecard, and is endorsed for approval to the Board of Trustees.



The 2007 Membership Committee during a deliberation of membership applications

Regular Members, meanwhile, are organizations that have actively operated for at least three years, and satisfy all other membership requirements. Such members are entitled to all membership privileges, and can have a say in the election of the members of the AF Board of Trustees.

Applicants must submit a comprehensive file of documents: the organization's articles of incorporation, by-laws, audited financial statements of the last three years with proof of submission to the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and SEC, the general information sheet submitted to the SEC, a description of current programs, annual reports and brochures for the last three years, a list of its Board of Trustees with occupations and contact details, an organizational chart, an endorsement from at least one active AF member, a board resolution naming an official representative eligible for nomination to the AF Board of Trustees, and a signed agreement



Executive Director Oman Jiao conducting a meeting at the AF office

with AF's principles and the Code of Conduct for Development NGOs. Being accredited by the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC), described in its website as "the NGO sector's 'self-regulatory mechanism' in ensuring the integrity, transparency, accountability, and service of an accredited NGO," is recommended.

By insisting on such requirements, AF enables its members to fulfill their commitments to their donors, partners, clients, and the general public through the delivery of good, effective programs for Philippine development, with the highest professional and ethical standards.

All applicants pay a one-time processing fee of P1,000, as well as what Jiao calls a "socialized" system of annual dues based on the organization's assets, what he considers further proof of the network's commitment to inclusivity and fairness. Thus, annual dues can range from P2,000 for an organization worth P1 million or less, to P10,000 for one with assets between P25 and P50 million, to the biggest figure, P25,000 for an organization worth over P1 billion in assets.

"We still have to mobilize resources, though, so we still have to beg," Jiao muses, revealing that income from annual membership fees total only around P2.5 million. "But to some extent, maybe there's truth to the belief that if you do something good, then resources will come. And we've been able to do this, and even grow." The aforementioned endowment fund initiated by Judy Araneta Roxas has provided a buffer through its annual interest income which may be used by AF as a last resort, although this was used by AF only once in over two decades of the fund's existence.

To illustrate the fairness that Jiao considers one of AF's core values, he recalls one general assembly when somebody was trying to reserve a choice seat for one foundation bigwig. "I said, I'm sorry but there are no reserved seats in AF. Not even our trustees have reserved seats, I said. So if you want to stay in front, just put your bag beside you so you can reserve that seat."

With regional participants coming from Mindanao, Visayas, and Luzon, Jiao emphasizes that everyone is on equal footing. "The members of

What we believe

The AF Statement of Principles

As members of the Association of Foundations, we believe:

THAT the development of people is our enduring interest, and to this end shall our every investment and expenditure be made.

THAT the funds we administer are not our own, but are held in trust by the Foundation to further the purpose for which the Foundation was created.

THAT every proponent or correspondent is entitled to our time and must be accorded prompt attention, respect, and consideration.

THAT justice impels us to be clear and purposeful in our requirements for fund releases, and to meet our funding commitment when and as scheduled.

THAT truth binds us to state the actual reason for accepting or rejecting any proposal.

THAT since Foundations are established by virtue of public trust, we are bound to render public accounting of our activities.

THAT our manner of operations, whether in the provision of funds, or in the seeking of funds, or in their use, shall not compromise integrity.



A Christmas party at the AF office, circa 1993–1995

AF are happy with that, that there is no favoritism. Even our major sponsors that have given us big money, they don't have reserved seats. And they know that in AF."

2. First members outside NCR

It was July 24, 1970, 55 years ago, when Carlos Locsin, Msgr. Antonio Fortich, Eriberto V. Garcia, Antonio C. Cumagun, and Antonio J. Montinola—Negrenses all, and farmers or landowners keen on the development of their province—established the Negros Economic Development Foundation (NEDF). "We're even older than AF," says Rose Depra, NEDF's Executive Director since 1993, with a laugh. "We were probably one of the first foundations outside of Manila to join AF."

NEDF had started as a research organization in support of businesses, Depra recalls, but when the sugar crisis took place in the province in the late '70s to 80s, driven by the collapse of the international sugar market and the monopoly of the industry by Marcos cronies, the people of Negros were in the midst of famine. "That's when we started implementing development projects," said Depra, who became part of NEDF in 1987. These projects targeted health and nutrition, and support for sugarcane workers and small farmers. The foundation also partnered with the Cooperative Housing Foundation in Washington DC, which equipped NEDF technically to implement a socialized housing project that has benefited some 2,500 families to date.

Earlier, the foundation had received 35 hectares of land in Barangay Handumanan in Bacolod, donated to them in 1973 by the Andres Soriano Corporation. Informal settlers from the Bacolod area were relocated there, and today, the barangay has a population of 45,000 people, and is the site of a livelihood demo farm, as integrated agricultural development is one of NEDF's major programs. In fact, these programs are covered by the acronym SHINES: Social Housing; Health; Integrated Agricultural Development; Networking and Linkages; Entrepreneurship and Empowerment; and Sustainability. "It's the low-income families who are really benefiting from the project. And we're implementing this all throughout the province in partnership with the provincial government," Depra says.

It was NEDF's late Executive Director Leonardo "Boy" Gallardo Jr. who was very active with AF. "We had to pay for our own travel and accommodation to attend meetings at the time,



NEDF's Rose Depra



Depra (third fom right) and volunteers during a tree-planting event

because AF really had no money," recalls Depra, who was often nominated to represent the region before becoming an AF trustee for six years. She remembers when a financial report was submitted, and the association had only P100,000 in its coffers, and only one or two people on the staff.

It wasn't really a culture shock, being a regional foundation joining AF. Also, interaction then was limited to annual meetings. Eventually, when resources increased, NEDF would be invited to join capacity building activities, from which the foundation certainly benefited. Depra remembers a trip to Gen. Santos City for entrepreneurship training. "Actually, the reason why we stayed this long with AF is because we benefited as a member from networking." When Oman Jiao became Executive Director and Judy Araneta Roxas initiated the endowment fund, things changed: Money came in and membership increased, Depra reports.

With the internet, access to information also improved for provincial NGOs far from the NCR. AF paved the way for NEDF's partnerships with the Coca-Cola Foundation and SM Foundation, for instance, the latter working with NEDF on medical missions. "If they have needs here in the region, in Bacolod or in Negros, they keep in touch with us. I can say that our foundation benefited because of our partnership with SM Foundation. Networking is really important," Depra affirms. Meanwhile, NEDF shared with AF members their best practices in working with farmers.

Having gone through a lot with the Association, Depra says she feels really proud



Urban reforestation is a major project of NEDF.



Former Jaime V. Ongpin Foundation, Inc. Executive Director Marichu Lopez (leftmost) with former DENR Secretary Toni Yulo in Siargao

of it, and invites people regularly to participate in the LEAD to Serve courses. "AF is really very transparent. From the time that I joined, the governance of AF has really represented our foundation as a member. And there's the feeling of family, like you belong, it's still there despite the growth in size."

The Jaime V. Ongpin Foundation, Inc. (JVOFI) was established in 1980, originally known as the BenguetCorp Foundation and renamed in honor of the late former Minister of Finance Jaime V. Ongpin. Originally meant to address the needs of company employees, the foundation later expanded to include even neighboring communities as beneficiaries, to help make them self-reliant. Thus, programs include enterprise development, microfinance, ecological enhancement, resource management, and internal capacity building. "We're the oldest and most established foundation in Northern Luzon, which covers a big area, not just Benguet or Baguio," says former Executive Director Marichu Lopez. "Our board is composed of civic-minded people—not just in our area, but nationally and internationally."

Lopez joined JVOFI in 1984, and was Executive Director from 1997 until her recent retirement. JVOFI joined AF on the initiative of the foundation's late former Executive Director Dr. Nelly Alabanza, Lopez recounts. "We're located in Baguio, so we needed to be updated on what's going on in development work, foundations, and also funding, of course. I think Dr. Alabanza's intention was exposure; being in the northern Philippines, where the CSOs are not as mature, we needed to be connected to what's happening in Manila, and to other NGOs. If I recall, AF was the first network our foundation ever joined."

Since this was the era before online meetings, the main challenges were "geography and distance," Lopez says. "We had to travel to participate." She recalls getting involved at a time when AF was becoming more active and developing clearer standards for membership, having been involved in the creation of the Philippine Council for NGO Certification, for example, giving members access to information on the criteria for certifying NGOs. "That enabled us also to improve our own policies, systems, and procedures so that when the time came for certification, we were prepared." Because AF is well-known, donors approach the Association to check on a member's credibility and to ask for leads or endorsements, especially in the regions.

Keeping abreast of such standards for NGOs helped in "building our track record and our credibility and integrity," Lopez says. "Plus, it helps to belong to a network that is heterogeneous. You're able to interact with people coming from different backgrounds, specialized in different sectors. The interaction is very rich. It also enables us to focus on cross-cutting issues, like, for example, the legal requirements of CSOs."

Membership expansion had always been one of AF's goals, and the organization is clear about their role. "They're very conscious about serving their members," Lopez notes. "And the training they provide enables us to be on par with our peers in Metro Manila. It's not just focusing on the needs of the sector, but on organizational capability, to implement development work

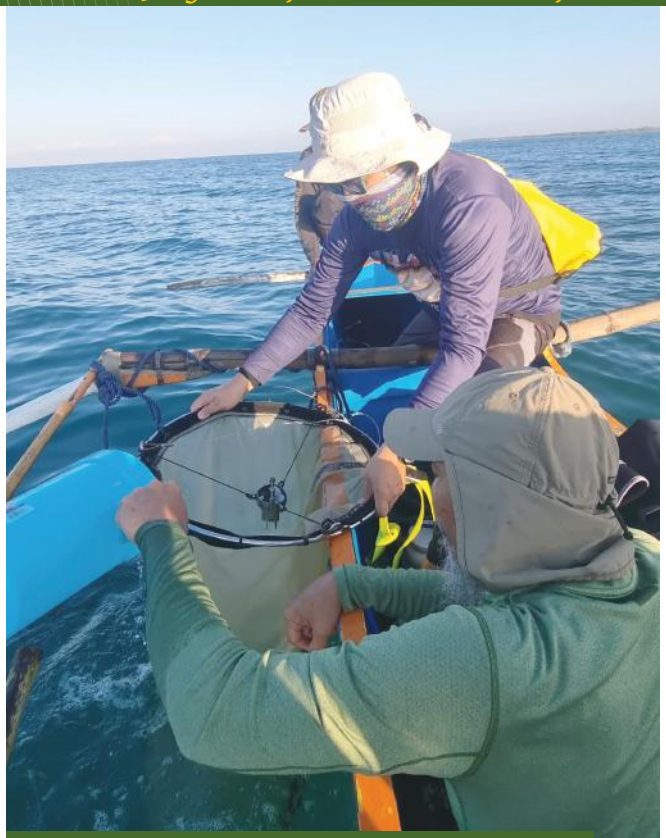
effectively, efficiently, and with integrity."

Today, after 45 years, JVOFI has evolved into a more independent foundation, moving from social services to environmental projects—"Since mining was a part of our history that we cannot deny," Lopez notes—and with the microfinance aspect spun off into the JVO Microfinance Foundation, Inc. "AF was very helpful in our own growth, by referring us to donors, by sharing information on possible donors and partners." For example, JVOFI now collaborates with the Coca-Cola Foundation on a solid waste management project covering several municipalities in La Union, focused on plastics, and is a partner of the World Food Program in disaster preparedness and response.

JVOFI has also brought their experience to the table for AF's benefit. For several years, Lopez represented Luzon and a handful of regional members. She even took this representation to the Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP), as part of the advisory group, where she was among those in charge of evaluating proposals submitted to PACAP, funded by the Australian government. Lopez also spoke for AF in meetings with the Partnership for Development Assistance in the Philippines (PDAP).

Looking to AF's future at this junction, funding, naturally, remains a leading concern, Lopez concludes. "There's really a huge decline in donors, so we need to look internally. In the Philippines, imagine the money lost to corruption. If they were more open to working with CSOs, then a lot can be done. And not only with CSOs, but even among corporations, because now, accountability is being demanded of them.

"So what do we do, given that donor funds really cannot be relied on long-term? We need to work in partnership and collaboration with each other. And I think AF is well-placed to help members bridge, to connect, to develop, to have the capacities." ■



JVOFI also does work in marine and coastal areas.



Lopez (left) at the JVOFI project site at the Amburayan River Basin and Watershed



The Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. provides aid for disaster resilience in affected areas.

B. The pioneers: AF originals

SEVERAL FOUNDATIONS had been with AF since its beginnings, contributing to the Association's growth and evolution while bringing their own prestige and expertise to the table.

1. Commitment to its home town: The Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc.

As recounted in the 2016 publication *The Foundation Called Ramon Aboitiz* by Resil B. Mojares, "On 16 November 1966, Don Ramon Aboitiz established a non-stock, non-profit organization to which he endowed shares of company stocks. It was a generous endowment of around 20 percent of his most profitable personal shares in the Aboitiz companies, particularly in the power companies. As the story of Boys' Town in 1953 indicates, the idea of a non-profit organization for purposes of social assistance may have been on his mind for a long time." Thus was the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI) born in Cebu City. Ramon and his brothers had established Viuda y Hijos de P. Aboitiz, what would later become Aboitiz & Company Inc., in 1920, a family corporation with interests in shipping, power, construction, and banking. When Ramon passed away in 1974, his son Eduardo succeeded him in both the company and the foundation. RAFI joined AF in 1976.

In 1973, RAFI had amended its articles of incorporation to state the foundation's goal as dedicating its net income "exclusively to educational and/or charitable or religious corporations, institutions, foundations, trust or philanthropic organizations, or research institutions or organizations." Thus, the foundation, as most family foundations then, managed a fund set up to support the various



RAFI has projects in early childhood care and development.



The AF board with Roberto 'Bobby' Aboitiz (center, in white)

charities and service organizations dependent on Don Ramon's largesse. Beyond charity, however, RAFI invested in vocational education; Don Ramon was "genuinely interested in institutional means to address social problems as well as measures of long-lasting social reform," RAFI says in a statement.

The family patronage continued; under Eduardo Aboitiz, RAFI offered grants, donations, and loans to various institutions and religious and civic organizations, even local government units, and "individuals, for educational and emergency needs." In 1985, Eduardo's son Roberto took over as foundation President, further boosting the level of community engagement in their home province.

RAFI has had several long-running programs, such as One to Tree, which improved biodiversity through tree-planting over the last 20 years, and Gabii sa Kabilin, promoting Cebu's heritage since 2007. It counts seven current "transformative" programs inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and carried out in collaboration with government agencies such as the Department of Education and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Under disaster management, there is Building Resilience and Adaptation in Vulnerable Ecosystems in Cebu (BRAVE), which aims to establish disaster-resilient Cebuano communities, and Greener Cebu, which aspires for the same goal in a balanced ecosystem. Under health, Cebuano Communities Access to Relevant and Equitable Primary Healthcare Services (CARES) envisions healthier Cebuanos everywhere. Under early childhood care and development, Sustainable Interventions for Nutrition and Growth (SINAG) hopes to make every Cebuano child happy, healthy, and ready to achieve their full potential by age 5. For basic education, Transformative Actions for Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes (TALINO) has literacy as a goal for every child by age 10. Bayanihan Actions for Impact (BAI), a youth development program, seeks to involve youth in nation building. Finally, CeBloom sees every Cebuano community enriching its own local culture. In 2024, RAFI reached 186,800 people through these different programs, which were also rolled out in other LGUs. The foundation is anchored on its constant pillars of social change, sustainability and resilience, performance excellence, and culture and people for the future.

RAFI, which turns 60 years old in 2026, acknowledges that AF has provided them with opportunities to work with other NGOs, form partnerships, and share knowledge. AF also provides a venue to discuss issues and experiences of NGO work in the Visayas, even as RAFI learns from groups around the country.

2. Molding regional leaders: The Asian Institute of Management Scientific Research Foundation, Inc.

Since its founding in 1968 alongside the Asian Institute of Management (AIM), the academic institution established the same year in Makati by business leaders, schools, and the Harvard Business School advisory board, the Asian Institute of



The Asian Institute of Management in Makati (Photo from the AIM website)

Management Scientific Research Foundation, Inc. (AIM SRF) has worked for almost 60 years with the school's benefactors, donors, alumni, and supporters to advance academic and research work, as a non-stock, non-profit organization meant to mobilize AIM's financial resources and ensure its sustainability.

AIM SRF receives and manages contributions, gifts, endowments, donations, and grants for management education, research, and development practice. This means bankrolling scientific and research projects, a key focus carried out through SRF Centers in different disciplines to address critical economic, social, and environmental challenges in the Philippines and Asia.

Among these centers are the Rizalino S. Navarro Policy Center for Competitiveness (RSN), established in 1996 as AIM's research organization for public policy; the Ramon V. Del Rosario, Sr. Center on Enterprise for Society (RVR), which advocates responsible business practices, ethical leadership, and sustainability in institutions in the Philippines and the Asian region; the Gov. Jose B. Fernandez, Jr. Center for Sustainable Finance (JBF Center), a research institution that works to incorporate environmental, social, and governance principles in finance; and the Dr. Andrew L. Tan Center for Tourism (DALT), a research think-tank advancing the tourism sector in the Philippines and Asia, studying such issues as capacity-building, events, tourism policy, and networking.

AIM SRF extends scholarships, financial assistance, and even loans to deserving students from different backgrounds. "At the individual level," the foundation says in a statement, "beneficiaries consistently attest that the foundation's support enabled them to pursue advanced education that would otherwise have been beyond reach. Scholarships provided not only financial assistance, but also the stability and confidence necessary for scholars to fully immerse themselves in rigorous academic programs."

AIM SRF extends scholarships, financial assistance, and even loans to deserving students from different backgrounds

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were new opportunities for innovation that allowed AIM's data scientists to contribute to crisis management. Recently, the foundation also moved towards digitalization to fully modernize operations. Such scholarships, and expanded use of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in academics and operations—high-tech classrooms and case rooms come to mind—are among the foundation's core pillars moving forward.

AIM SRF joined AF in 1975, motivated by "a shared commitment to advancing philanthropy, good governance, and sustainable social impact." Being part of AF has also given the foundation access to "a community of like-minded organizations, best practices, and learning



The Andres Soriano Foundation, Inc. promotes seaweed farming as an alternative livelihood. (Photo from the ASFI wesbite)

opportunities that enhance our institutional capacity," AIM SRF's statement further elaborates. "Through AF, we have gained valuable insights into effective foundation management, compliance, and impact-driven programming, which have helped us further professionalize our operations."

3. Reaching out to the islands: The Andres Soriano Foundation, Inc.

"Long before concepts such as corporate social responsibility and sustainable development became mainstream," says The Andres Soriano Foundation, Inc. (ASF) in a statement, "ASF promoted self-help, partnership, and community-driven development rather than short-term dole-outs.



ASFI also supports women weavers in Palawan for additional livelihood. (Photo from the ASFI website)

"In its early years, ASF directly implemented and managed community programs, helped establish and strengthen local foundations, and built their capacity to operate independently. Through this growth and replication model, ASF has helped organize and operationalize over 10 social development institutions nationwide, eventually spinning them off once they became self-sustaining."

ASF has been around since 1968, anchored on public service and encouraging self-help, partnerships, and community development. In 1999, the co-existing Andres Soriano Jr. Foundation, Inc. and the Andres Soriano Cancer Research Foundation, Inc. were merged with ASF, making the latter the surviving entity, continuing its work in collaboration with the private sector, government, and civil society, as well as various sectors like farmers, fisherfolk, women, youth, scholars, cancer patients in particular, and disaster-affected communities. Like RAFI, ASF also identified their "home" sites for community development in Quiniluban and Cuyo Island in Palawan, the province which counts some 1,800 islands that are often unreachable by government, medical, and NGO aid.

Among the foundation's projects are the Small Islands Sustainable Development Program (SISDEP), launched in 1986 in Manamoc, Cuyo, which aims to make life better for residents of



Executives and donors of DLSU sign MOAs for scholarship support.

small islands, while protecting their natural environment. SISDEP is now in over 30 coastal communities, with marine and forest conservation as the main impetus, along with alternative livelihoods, market connections, basic health and nutrition, water systems, medical missions, classroom building, technical-vocational facilities, and scholarships.

Cancer Abatement and Rehabilitation Efforts (CARE) is based on ASF's long-standing commitment to the prevention and care of this dreaded disease. CARE supports cancer registries for national data, research, treatment assistance for indigent patients, cancer information for awareness and prevention, and partnerships with hospitals and pharmaceutical companies.

Over the years, while ASF's focus areas—health, education, livelihood, and environmental conservation—have remained the same, these have expanded to include early-grade literacy and learning recovery programs, better nutrition and maternal health, and continued expansion of cancer awareness and prevention through CARE. Although Quiniluban had a recorded number of 710 malnourished children in 2014, for example, ASF backed the First 1,000 Days Program, where proper nutrition addresses the critical "window of opportunity" for brain and immune system development and growth in children, and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), such as through the improved Manamoc water system. Under CARE, approximately 204 cancer patients have received chemotherapy maintenance medicines, while around 30 oncology fellows underwent sponsored specialized training. ASF likewise supported social enterprises that increased the number of weavers from five to over 150 across 10 Palawan island communities, generating over P5 million in cumulative sales directly benefiting households.

"We were inspired to join the AF network because of its commitment to fostering collaboration among foundations and amplifying the impact of social development initiatives across the country," states ASF, one of AF's founding members. "Being part of AF has allowed our foundation to learn best practices, access valuable resources, and engage with like-minded organizations that share our vision of empowering communities...AF has also opened opportunities for partnerships and knowledge exchange, helping us maximize the reach and sustainability of our projects."

4. For next-generation minds: The De La Salle University Science Foundation, Inc.

The De La Salle University Science Foundation, Inc. (DLSUSFI) was first known as the De La Salle College Science Foundation when it was founded in April 1968. The school itself goes back as far as 1911, but it was only in the late 1960s that school President Brother Hyacinth Gabriel FSC and academic Vice President Brother Andrew Gonzalez FSC resolved that private educational institutions like them had to maximize funds to make quality education accessible to all, as well as to provide scholarships, funds for continuing faculty training and research, and infrastructure expansion.

The foundation also hoped to tap alumni, the business sector, and friends of the school. With the school's registration with the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the National

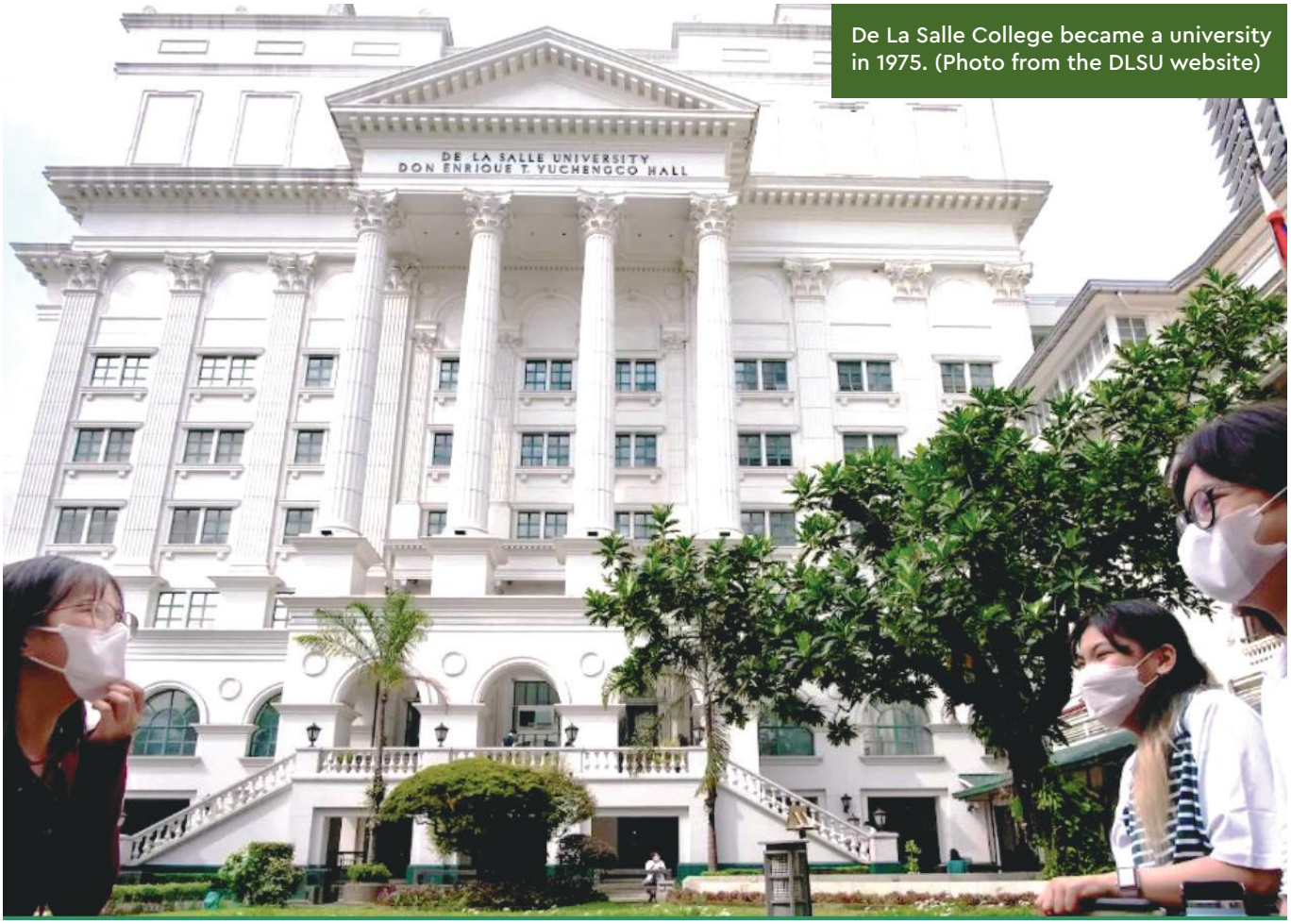
Science Development Board, the foundation was allowed to receive tax-deductible donations from people and organizations.

These donors stepped up for the foundation's first project, the Student Aid Program, composed of four plans: the Student Aid General Fund, the Scholarship Fund, Grant-Aid, and the Student Loan Fund. The program successfully raised funds for deserving students of De La Salle College—so successfully, in fact, that even scholars outside the De La Salle system were helped. When the college became a university in 1975, the foundation's name also changed, and the scholarships extended to faculty members, along with the establishment of professorial chairs.

The program successfully raised funds for deserving students of De La Salle College; even scholars outside the De La Salle system were helped

Today, DLSUSFI's broader objectives cover the promotion and accessibility of quality education; training next generation scientists and engineers; promoting research in such fields as agriculture, health, the biological, physical, atomic, food, engineering, and social sciences, and the humanities; bringing research and developmental work to industry; and supporting new technology and start-ups, such as through the merger in 2024 with Animo Labs Foundation, a technology business incubator set up in cooperation with the Department of Science and Technology–Philippine Council for Industry, Energy, and Emerging Technology Research and Development (DOST-PCIEERD).

Also in 2024, the foundation marked an increase in revenue due to investments and continuous support from Evelyn D. Ang Scholarships and Charities Inc. and The De La Salle University-Manila. ■



De La Salle College became a university in 1975. (Photo from the DLSU website)



LBC Hari ng Padala Foundation Program Specialist Mel Macarubbo helps repaint a school.

C. When teamwork works: Foundations joining forces

AF'S 2024 Network Aggregate Report, which represented 226 members or 85 percent of the total of 255, reported that 40 percent of these members had collaborated on projects, whether it was joint project implementation or providing additional funding for another member's work. Some 24.3 percent of members worked with two or more groups, while 15.5 percent worked with one other organization. That still left 60 percent of members not interacting at all that year.

"It's a challenge within the AF network," says Gina Estipona, Program Manager for two major collaboration initiatives of AF beyond the membership, Igniting Climate Action and Responsibility for the Environment (ICARE) and Zero Extreme Poverty Philippines 2030, now Zero Poverty Philippines 2030 (ZeP2030). "So far, we haven't hit our target yet. So it's a bit low compared to our aspiration. And that's something that we're trying to address now and in the coming months."

Estipona admits it may be because of some challenges. "One is making sure the shared agenda is clear. Another is knowing who is in charge, who is really in the role of a backbone support organization that facilitates the coordination among different stakeholders. It may be okay in the beginning, everyone is excited, but at some point the momentum may not be sustained."

Then there is the matter of managing expectations. "So what do we get from that partnership or collaboration? For others, they expect some funding, support for their programs, which is not always the case, because sometimes the contributions of organizations are also programs."

So what is the role of the AF in all this, its main responsibility? When there were regional alliances, AF was driving and facilitating them. Today, it's about taking a more active and well-defined role in precisely increasing collaboration among members.

That is not to say fruitful collaborations have not taken place, however, as some member foundations have certainly taken the idea of working hand-in-hand to new levels.

1. Moving it forward, and more

The LBC Hari ng Padala Foundation was initially established in 2001, but started operating in 2010. "We have our existing programs—education, environmental sustainability, employee



Macarubbo explains to young listeners. The LBC Hari ng Padala Foundation also provides books and videos for children.

welfare, as well as special programs, which include Move It Forward, our shipping sponsorship," enumerates Melissa-Ann "Mel" Macarubbo, the foundation's Program Specialist. The assistance covers a wide range of needs, including gift-giving during Christmas, scholarship grants, and donations of equipment. Move It Forward, in particular, is very helpful, LBC being a massive company with over 6,000 locations, partners, and agents in some 30 countries, about 1,400 of those branches found all over the Philippines—even as the foundation only has a team of four people. Having been a member of AF since 2015, and with LBC committed to moving items for grassroots organizations for free, it has naturally sponsored AF's delivery needs, aside from financial assistance in fundraising projects.

It's an expected reach, because LBC Hari ng Padala is a grant-making foundation—that is, they accept proposals from other foundations with people in the field but little resources, and provide the funding. The benefit for LBC is less work when it comes to implementing the project on the ground, says Macarubbo. "You just have to be keen on the monitoring and evaluation, reporting, and compliance." This is where AF has been a big help, she adds, because with a collaborator's membership in AF, "You're assured of good governance, because of the requirements of membership. You need to submit a financial report, so you have to report to AF. So *nakikita mo yung nangyayari* (you see what's happening)."

The annual AF general assembly, Macarubbo says, is where networking and initial contacts happen for collaborations, where she is approached for such projects, and she in turn asks for proposals. "We usually partner with a combination of big and grassroots organizations, as long as we have the same values and the same mission, and they're aligned with our own programs." There's due diligence to find out more about the other foundation, followed by meetings, before the details of the collaboration are finalized. A PCNC certification is also a plus, another assurance of a well-run group.

LBC began collaborating with World Vision Development Foundation, Inc. in 2011, the same year Macarubbo joined LBC, by giving scholarships from Grade 1 to senior high school to 150 students in seven of the country's poorest

areas; the program is waiting for its last 10 students to graduate. LBC also sponsors 40 college students in Baguio, Bulacan, Tondo, and Cavite through the Upskills Foundation, Inc. The unexpected bonus is that, through the collaboration, LBC was able to convince Upskills to join AF. "I told them about the benefits, as AF provides mentoring, for example, to familiarize us with government issues or guidelines and policies, or to help us identify weaknesses in our organizations." That's aside from grant-making foundations getting endorsements from AF in terms of which groups can benefit from existing programs and donations, she adds. Then, of course, there are the training and workshops; as of this writing, Macarubbo is in the middle of her LEAD to Serve course, AF's flagship leadership training program.

LBC also works with the Kalipay Negrese Foundation, which helps some 110 children who were abused, abandoned, or victims of trafficking, providing school material as well as salaries for special teachers, as such children are unable to go to normal schools for the time being. And then there are collaborations with the Adarna Foundation and the Knowledge Channel, not just to provide books and videos, but to train teachers to ensure sustainability of the effort.

'AF is really a big help in making sure partners deliver. They can play watchdog for you, find out what the problems are'

There are, of course, challenges that come with the collaboration, Macarubbo says. "You can't closely check on the people on the ground who handle the money, and *hindi mo puede pagsabihan yung tao nila* (you can't call out the staff of your partner organization); you'll have to go to the top to do that. Then there are programs that lose continuity because people resign and there's a change in staff, and there was no proper turnover. But I think AF is really a big help in making sure partners deliver. They can play watchdog for you, find out what the problems are, and help resolve them." Thus, with such acceptable safeguards, LBC Hari ng Padala Foundation remains very open to continue on their path of generosity.

2. Not just chalk and a blackboard

Also going strong in their search for deserving and needy young men for life-changing vocational training is Dualtech Training Center



Electromechanics tehnology is one of the courses offered at the Dualtech Training Center Foundation, Inc.





(Above) Dualtech students get hands-on training in vocational skills; (left) Dualtech's Director for External Relations Rodolfo Sta. Ana

Foundation, Inc., a private vocational school project, headquartered in Canlubang, Calamba, Laguna. It was established in 1982, and applies the German Dual Training System in the Philippines. "That means there are two places of learning," says Rodolfo "Okeek" Sta. Ana, the foundation's Director for External Relations. "One is the school, and the other is the company. The training is technical, vocational, and accredited, and we deal with electrical and mechanical skills. These are all actual, hands-on, computer-based, with exercises and workshops—*hindi lang* (not just) chalk and a blackboard." Since 1982, Dualtech has tied up with some 200 companies and enterprises, resulting in approximately 15,000 graduates.

Sta. Ana attributes their foundation's success to the fact that they seek out the youth. "During our promotions, we tell them how joining this program can really help them and their families." The scholars are recruited from some of the poorest places in the country where Dualtech's partner foundations are present. Training means six months of schooling, Mondays to Fridays in Canlubang, before they are brought to partner companies for on-the-job training, then progressing to bona-fide employment in the company after graduation. The students are also housed in the neighboring community—Dualtech pays for rooms or bed spaces in local homes, which also means added income for residents—and they receive an allowance as well as additional values formation, "especially on how to get along well with other people," Sta. Ana says. An advantage is the program's flexibility, as it does not follow a typical school year schedule; a scholar can be recruited and begin training at any time.

Dualtech goes on regular trips to meet potential scholars, usually senior high school students, in different areas where their partners operate. *"Ang daming nakatambay, baka malulong lang sa bisyo* (So many of them are just idle, they might just end up developing vices)," Sta. Ana says. "They're the ones we target." They have scholars from Bukidnon, for example, from the

area where the Del Monte Foundation works, and from Romblon, Surigao Del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya, Cebu, and Zambales, among others, courtesy of the Lao Foundation, Inc.; these include students from indigenous communities. Other tie-ups include those with the local government of Arteche in Eastern Samar, the Assisi Foundation, Tanging Yaman, Learning Without Borders, the Aboitiz Foundation, and the Chito Madrigal Foundation, among many others. The Radio Mindanao Network Foundation helps to advertise these scholarships to more places. The students then get on-the-job training in such established corporations as Suzuki, Honda, Enchanted Kingdom, San Miguel Corporation, and more.

In fact, Dualtech currently has a good problem, Sta. Ana reveals: They have about 1,200 openings waiting to fill up in their partner training companies. "We tell our graduates, since you've seen what the program can do, share it with your friends and relatives so we can duplicate it." That it sounds too good to be true has proven to be a real issue sometimes, Sta. Ana notes with a laugh: "*Akala nila* scammer *kami!* (They actually think we're scammers!) We go to such far-off places in the mountains, and the people wonder why. It takes some convincing."

There are groups who want to fast-track partnership agreements; Sta. Ana asks them to first come visit and see what Dualtech is all about. Then there are occasional requests from smaller foundations to augment funds, such as, for example, the cost of sending a chosen scholar to Canlubang, a plea which Dualtech accommodates whenever possible.

The greatest advantage of being in AF, says Sta. Ana, is "making connections. That's number one. And then there's the training we receive as AF members—like in climate change, for example, and how it can affect what we do here in Dualtech."

Collaborations do require patience, says Sta. Ana, especially when different groups have different priorities. Still, when several foundations are able to work together, more beneficiaries can be reached and the fruits can be shared. "Collaboration is a win-win situation; even a small thing becomes big when we help each other." ■



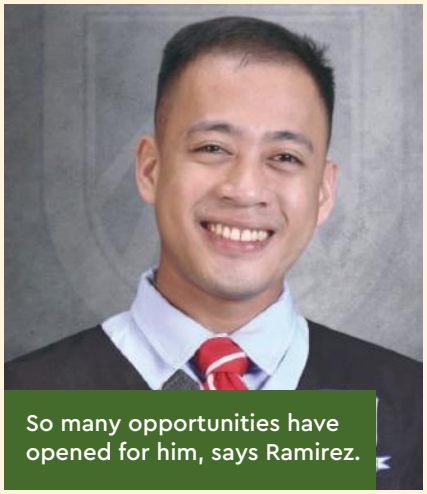
Dualtech recruits scholars from many remote, impoverished communities, and graduates are guaranteed employment.

Collaborations can create second chances

His initial education may have been derailed, but Mark Christian Ramirez was given a new opportunity to learn—and thrive—through vocational training

In 2022, Mark Christian Ramirez was in college at the Bohol Island State University in Tagbilaran, pursuing a degree in secondary education, major in mathematics, when he was forced to stop schooling. His father, a farmer who moonlighted as a tricycle driver, and his mother, a housewife, had to contend with his grandfather's diagnosis with prostate cancer, so the money for Ramirez's schooling became unavailable. One of three siblings, the diligent Ramirez refused to be idle, and decided instead to pursue vocational training scholarships. He was referred by the Assisi Development Foundation, which offers educational assistance, to the Dualtech Training Center Foundation, Inc., where he was accepted into the electronics technology program.

Because Dualtech pioneered the Dual Training System in the Philippines, Ramirez first joined the Basic Skills Training Program, which covers the fundamentals of electronics, mechanical, electrical, motor control, and welding skills. While this phase can last some six months, Ramirez completed the rounds of his training in just two, applying himself earnestly from around 7 am to 7 pm daily, while resting on weekends—all while being housed in the Dualtech mentoring hub in Canlubang, Laguna.



So many opportunities have opened for him, says Ramirez.

The second phase involves on-the-job training, when students are deployed to Dualtech's partner companies to apply what they learned, and already receive a salary. Ramirez trained with Styrotech Corporation in Bulacan, Suzuki Philippines in Laguna, and Forgems Corporation, also in Laguna, and after officially graduating from the Dualtech program last Nov. 8, 2025, is now a full-time assistant operator at Forgems.

Needless to say, Ramirez is now the family breadwinner, sending money home every payday and taking care of the allowance of his younger sibling, who is still in school. ***"Sobra!"*** (A lot!) exclaims the now 23-year-old Ramirez—who, incidentally, graduated with recognition as an "academic achiever" from the program—on how the scholarship changed his life. ***"Ang daming*** opportunities ***na nag***-open, ***at ang daming natulungan na batang katulad ko*** (So many opportunities opened, and so many kids like me were helped)." The system at Dualtech was particularly effective because of the intensive on-the-job training that prepares a student very well for work. *"May work agad, hindi ka na maghahanap ng kumpanya, at hindi ka na hahanapan ng* experience (There's work immediately, you don't have to look for a company, and they don't have to ask about your experience)," Ramirez adds.

The accomplishment has allowed Ramirez to continue dreaming. Although he still wants to finish his college degree, he is prioritizing the upscaling of his skills, as recommended in Republic Act No. 12063, the Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET) Framework Act, which considers it "the policy of the State to enhance the skills of the workforce in partnership with the private sector, and to meet the evolving skills and competency requirements of the rapidly changing world of work." Ramirez plans to pursue his national certification in electrical installation maintenance, and later become a certified plant mechanic, which entails a board examination—which could allow him to avail of the extended tertiary education equivalency and accreditation program (ETEEAP), which would in turn clear the path to a bachelor's degree, and to an even brighter future.

In the meantime, Ramirez has already recruited provincemates into the Dualtech program, and hopes for the chance to visit his hometown and talk about his experience—"so they can see what it has been like from my side." ■

AF ANTHEM

Lakas ng Isa, Lakas ng Lahat

Lyrics by **Evident**
Music arranged by **Joseph Anthony de Guzman**

STANZA 1:
Magkakaibang galing
Magkakaibang laban
Iba't ibang lakas
'Di nag-iwanan kahit kailan

STANZA 2:
'Di lang sa oras ng sakuna
Basta't may
nangangailangan
Tatayo at gagalaw
Handang-handang
magbayanihan

CHORUS:
Lakas ng isa, lakas ng lahat
Saradong landas
ay bubukas
Lakas ng Isa, lakas ng lahat
Oras ng dilim, bigyang
liwanag

STANZA 3:
Hinulma ng maraming
taon
Bayanihan sa bawat
dekada
Husay, lakas, tibay
Ang nagdala sa 'tin dito
ngayon

BRIDGE:
Sa madilim na daan
Lakas natin ang ilaw
Sa bayanihan
Sama-samang lakas ang
bubuhat

AF: Limang Dekada

by Maria Theresa Alegre

Dekada sitenta, dekadang makulay
Ang pibot ng pagbabago,
dekada ng pagbanyuhay
Tumibok ang puso,
nagkaroon ng himig
Para sa Inang Bayan,
sumibol ang pag-ibig.

Taong 1972, ito ang simula
Isang babae, tumayo, naghanda
Kanyang adhikaing
makatulong sa bayan
Sa pagbalangkas ng AF,
isinakatuparan
Hindi man madali ang
tatahaking daan
Ang pangakong pagtulong,
lakas-loob, sinimulan.

Sa kanyang una at
ikalawang dekada
Tumibay ang pundasyon,
sya ay nakilala
Sa pagsulat ng AF sa
kanyang kasaysayan
Naging kaakibat, mga katanungan
"Tama ba ito?" Bakit nagkaganyan?"
"Saan ka ba patungo, aming
Inang Bayan?"
Pangakong binitawan, kanyang
pinanghawakan
Tumayo, nakiisa, nakisali, tumulong
Ang pagbabago at pag-unlad,
tumulong isulong.

Dekada nobenta, mga
taon ng tagumpay
Ang kanyang mga pakpak,
kanyang ikinumpay
Nakisanib ng lakas,
nakilahok, tumayo
Nakihanay sa mga haliging
sa sektor ay bumuo
Sa gitna ng dilim, sa
gitna ng kawalan
Sa lahat ng takot, mga agam-agam
Bagong pag-asa, sumibol, nasilayan
Hawak-kamay, nangako,
hindi ka iiwan.

Sa kanyang ika-tatlumpong
kaarawan
Sa dami ng nagawa, sa
lahat ng dinaanan
Naging tanong sa kanya'y may
nais ka pa bang tayaan?
O dapat ka na bang
mamahinga, magpaalam?
Ang tanong ay nagmistulang
isang malaking hamon
At isang desisyon ang
kanyang naging tugon
May mga pagsubok man na
kanyang sinusuong
Di pa tapos ang AF sa kanyang
tinadhanang misyon.

Isang dekada nga ang
mabilis pang dumaan
Ang AF umabot sa apatnapung
taong gulang
Tumutok sa adhikaing sa mga
myembro ay maglingkod
Organisasyong iba-iba sa
AF ay nagbuklod.

At ngayon, ikaw, ako,
tayo ay naririto
Nagsasaya, nagdiriwang,
limampung taong-
gulang na nga tayo
Sa puso, naroon, pangakong
binitawan
Hangaring makapaglingkod
sa mahal nating bayan
Ang mga mahihina, ating
palalakasin
Mga mabuway na pundasyon,
ating patitibayin
Hamon ng bagong sibol, hamon
ng bagong dekada
Sa pinagsanib-lakas,
haharaping sama-sama
Tayo'y isang pamilya,
tayo'y isang pangkat
At ang lakas ng isa, ay
lakas ng lahat!

3 HEROES OF STRENGTH

Champions who paved the way



Reforestation is among the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc.'s many disaster mitigation projects.

A. Making a difference: Leaders who changed lives

1. Judy Araneta Roxas and her path of philanthropy

Judy Araneta Roxas was a prominent Filipino philanthropist and civic leader known for her long-standing involvement in non-profit governance, cultural advocacy, and social development initiatives. While widely recognized for her association with one of the Philippines' leading business families, her contributions to the NGO sector stand on their own, particularly in the areas of philanthropy, arts and culture, and institutional leadership.

As an NGO leader, Roxas was best characterized as a governance-oriented and institution-building figure. Unlike operational leaders who focus on program implementation, her strength lay in board leadership, strategic direction-setting, and network influence. She has contributed to shaping the policies and priorities of major philanthropic institutions, ensuring that they remain responsive to evolving social needs while maintaining high standards of accountability.

Her leadership style was often described as discreet but influential. She operated effectively behind the scenes, building consensus among stakeholders and supporting professional management teams. This approach was particularly valuable in organizations like AF, where aligning diverse members is critical to



Celebrating Judy Araneta Roxas' birthday at AF

collective impact. Her ability to convene leaders from business, philanthropy, and civil society strengthened cross-sector collaboration—an increasingly important feature of modern development work.

A defining feature of Roxas' NGO leadership was her role within AF, where she served as Chairperson of the Board of Trustees from 1998 to 2008 and 2010 to 2015. In this capacity, Roxas provided strategic oversight and governance leadership, helping guide the organization's direction in promoting effective and accountable philanthropy. Her tenure emphasized strengthening collaboration among member foundations and reinforcing the role of social concern in addressing national development challenges. Under her leadership, AF established an endowment fund which she spearheaded in 2001 with a seed fund of P9 million, contributed by philanthropists upon her invitation. Today, the endowment fund has already grown to P60 million, providing a buffer fund from the interest income, if AF will ever need it.

Under Roxas' leadership, AF established an endowment fund which she spearheaded in 2001 with a seed fund of P9 million, contributed by philanthropists upon her invitation

2. Ma. Socorro 'Marissa' Camacho and her advocacy of development

Ma. Socorro "Marissa" Camacho was a highly respected leader in the Philippine nonprofit and development sector, known for her strategic vision, coalition-building skills, and deep commitment to strengthening civil society. Across several decades, she played pivotal roles in shaping the country's network of NGOs, advancing philanthropy, and promoting sustainable, inclusive development. Her leadership style guided organizations and multi-stakeholder partnerships toward meaningful social impact.

Camacho served as AF President from 2000 to 2004. In this capacity, she represented AF in the Caucus of Development NGO Networks or CODE-NGO where she had an important leadership role in the development and implementation of the PEACe (Poverty Eradication and Alleviation Certificates) Bonds, a landmark financing initiative for civil society in the Philippines. The PEACe Bonds were issued in 2001 as an innovative mechanism to raise large-scale funding for poverty reduction through capital markets. Under her leadership, AF deepened its engagement with both local communities and international development partners, helping position Philippine philanthropy as a credible and influential force in broader development conversations.

Camacho also played a key role in large-scale development initiatives, including serving as Chief of Party for a USAID-supported civil society strengthening program. This position required high-level managerial competence, including oversight of complex project operations, stakeholder coordination, and results-based monitoring. Her leadership roles in such initiatives are documented in civil society assessments and program reports (CIVICUS, 2010). She was known for fostering participatory approaches and strengthening institutional capacity among partner organizations.



Marissa Camacho was known for her effective coalition-building.

Camacho's achievements are reflected not only in the organizations she led but also in the systems she helped strengthen. She contributed to professionalizing the NGO sector in the Philippines, promoting standards for governance, financial management, and impact evaluation. Her efforts helped elevate the credibility of civil society organizations, enabling them to engage more effectively with government and private sector partners. ■



A BDO Foundation financial literacy training session

B. Prime movers: Dynamic foundation heads

1. An advocate for financial inclusion

When he left Ayala Foundation, Mario Deriquito joined government as an undersecretary in the Department of Education. Before that, however, he had served as a trustee for AF in 2003–2007, 2009–2012, and 2019–2020. The job meant participating in committee work and attending meetings; he served as treasurer, chaired the capacity building committee, and eventually became AF Chairperson in 2020. The idea behind the LEAD to Serve Program, he recalls, had existed before, initiated by CODE-NGO. "It was called the successor generation, and the goal was to develop successors for the executive directors and presidents who were overstaying. But it really gained traction when AF picked it up around 2017."

Since leaving government in 2016, Deriquito has since become President of the BDO Foundation, bringing new innovations to the corporate foundation through its most important programs, foremost being financial inclusion. "Because we are a bank, one of our advocacies is inclusive growth—which means everybody should be able to participate in the economy and the formal financial system." That means using the bank's considerable financial and logistical resources, about 1,300 branches for BDO Unibank and another 600 for the BDO Network Bank, which caters to the masses.



BDO Foundation's Mario Deriquito

Under financial inclusion are programs for financial education to help raise Filipinos' level of financial literacy, and for capacity-building for micro-entrepreneurs. Deriquito didn't think the literacy could be achieved through mere seminars; instead, BDO Foundation worked with the Department of Education (DepEd) to integrate the subject into the school curriculum, producing age-appropriate videos and

lesson plans. "So it would teach things like, *anong gagawin mo sa pera mo?* (what will you do with your money?) We embedded the concepts into math, technical and vocational livelihood, *araling panlipunan* (social studies), regular subjects." In 2021, the DepEd formally mandated this addition to the curriculum.

Such literacy lessons branched out to reach soon-to-depart overseas Filipino workers—at last count, some 1.5 million of them, with BDO Foundation training the trainers. Farmers, fisherfolk, the urban poor, soldiers, and micro-entrepreneurs followed. Working with AF, BDO Foundation even held financial literacy webinars for NGO workers.

The foundation has other projects, such as the rehabilitation of rural health units, their contribution to universal health care, using the same contractors who build their branches nationwide. "And because of the improvement in physical facilities, they get to be more compliant with Department of Health and PhilHealth standards. *Kasi pumupunta yung mga tao* (because the people come)."

Surprisingly, it's a team of only nine employees doing all these. "You should be able to think strategically, and focus on things that can be scaled up and sustained over a long period of time," he says of the foundation's impact. The DepEd lesson plans, for example, are still there, and will remain indefinitely.

His work in government helped him develop the macro view, says Deriquito. "But I was also handling partnerships, so that enabled me to develop relationships with different groups, which is also important." A solid system for monitoring and evaluation is critical, or *"magkakalat ka talaga* (you'll be all over the place). Also essential, he adds,





BDO Foundation's Cebu earthquake relief program; (below) the foundation helped build a rural health unit in Pilar, Bohol.



Mahintana Foundation's Liza Lopez

are "training, empowering, and motivating your people. Finally, you have to be patient and decisive. And you can't just be satisfied with what you have now. It's not, *pwede na* (it will do), but what more can we do?"

So what's next for this veteran of corporate foundations? "Because BDO is very strong on ESG, we want to get more involved in the environment. Right now, we send employees to tree planting, coastal clean-ups, mainly to get them educated on environmental issues and develop that sustainability mindset and culture. We're really looking for something bigger."

Having been extended in his position for another three years, Deriquito has time to get it done, and make more of a difference in his organization. "A good foundation must stay relevant over time, so it should be able to adapt to change. It needs the ability to scale up, a good governance and management system, and a stable resource base, or the ability to continue getting support—because if you have a good cause, people will give."

2. A fighter for indigenous people

Liza Lopez has been with the Mahintana Foundation for 32 years, but the organization has been in existence for 48. Originally known as the corporate foundation of Dole Philippines Inc., it was spun off and became a full-fledged NGO in 1993, named after a Blaan word that combines the land and the sea. "We are actually in the indigenous people's communities," says Lopez, Mahintana's Executive Director, referring specifically to one tribe in Southern Mindanao . "So the majority of the community here is dominated by Blaan. We got our name from them, because of our programs and projects in both the Mt. Matutum Protected Landscape in Cotabato, which was declared a National Protected Area in 1995, and the Sarangani Bay Protected Seascape."

The foundation has four programs, with environmental protection, conservation, and rehabilitation as the flagship, integrating disaster risk reduction and management with climate action, Lopez notes. The other three, she adds, are basic social services; health, education, vision, sanitation, and water; enterprise development to provide livelihood support; and capacity building through institution building and governance (IBG).

Lopez pushed for inter-agency convergence in areas where 'pockets of intervention' existed with no harmonizing and coordination

Lopez holds the distinction of having joined the LEAD to Serve Program in November 2019, right before the pandemic, which is why the course extended to December 2021. "We just had around two face-to-face meetings, and after that, it was all online." She had been identified and recommended by Mahintana's former Executive Director and now President, Martiniano "Dodoy" Magdolot. "It helped me a lot, because I was preparing for the change in management. I developed my strategic thinking, and I had a lot of 'aha' moments—like, I had already been doing this, I just didn't know the name!"

Most significant to her were skills Magdolot already had applied, like resource mobilization, networking, conceptualization, and proposal writing. "What was absent at that time was talent management, performance management, and succession planning. That was the reason why, for more than two decades, our problem was the high turnover of staff. We just became a training ground. I was handling human resources at the time, so that was really my biggest concern." COVID-19, meanwhile, exposed the need for more robust business continuity plans, even



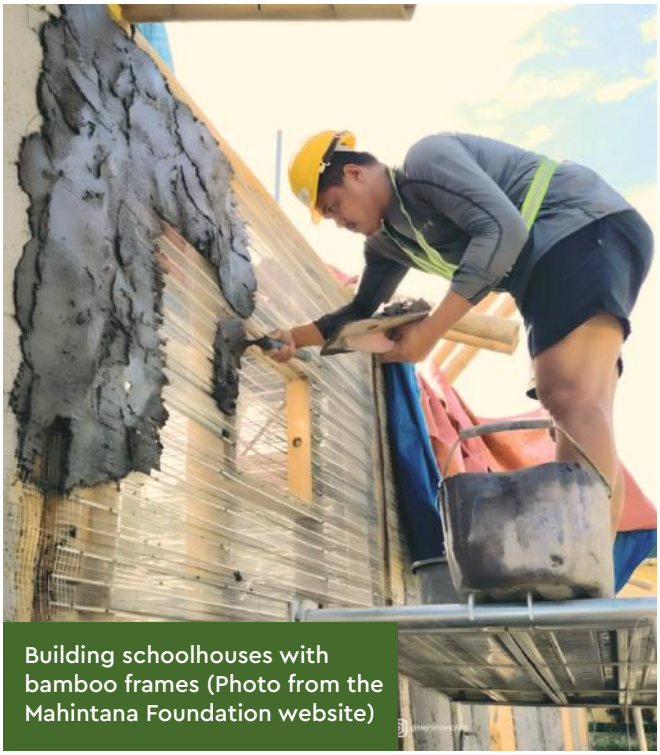
Mahintana Foundation turned over chickens to people's organizations in South Cotabato as part of a livelihood program. (Photo from the Mahintana Foundation website)

when, ironically, none of the foundation members stayed home: "We were all outside because we were doing relief operations, supporting the government and vaccination. It enhanced the risk management capacity of our organization." Completing her LEAD to Serve training was "a legacy for the foundation," Lopez says. "After 30 years, we finally had a succession plan."

Lopez pushed for inter-agency convergence in areas where "pockets of intervention" existed with no harmonizing and coordination. "The LGU itself has its programs and projects, as do the line government agencies like the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). There was this gap. Why not put all our programs and services together and establish a common development agenda so that our line government agencies, and even our local and foreign funding donors, can enter, so that we can have an overall development agenda and a complementation of resources?"

That's something she learned from AF, Lopez says. "AF is a network builder, right? That's its essence, along with its continued provision of capacity development support to its members, which helps us to implement programs and projects on the ground." Meanwhile, Mahintana contributes its expertise in providing technical assistance, especially when it comes to organizing on several levels. "We sit in local development councils and local special bodies, and this is the source of the very active CSO engagement, because our representation to the local government plays a crucial role in giving them community feedback. We are the frontliners, so we know what the problems really are."

The LEAD to Serve modules have been particularly effective, Lopez says, because they begin with a lot of internal work. "When you are a leader, you have to develop that self-awareness, active listening, empathy, and also conflict resolution and management. NGO work is complex. You must have that passion for your organization's mission and vision." ■



Building schoolhouses with bamboo frames (Photo from the Mahintana Foundation website)



The Peace and Equity Foundation conducts training programs to improve rice production in Nueva Ecija. (Photo from the PEF website)

C. Partners in strength: Hand-in-hand with AF

AF HARNESSES the power of networking and collaboration in pursuing developmental goals and objectives in the most impactful way possible. Through the years, AF has had the opportunity to be a member of strong networks of NGOs such as CODE-NGO locally, and WINGS internationally. AF has also built its credibility as a preferred partner in providing strategic coordination for the fruition and effective implementation of various development endeavors of partners such as the Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF), the Center for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), the Partnership for Development Assistance in the Philippines (PDAP), and the Foundation for a Sustainable Society, Inc. (FSSI), among others.

1. The **Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO)** is one of the largest umbrella organizations of civil society groups in the Philippines, representing thousands of NGOs and people's organizations nationwide. Established in 1991, CODE-NGO was formed to unify diverse development actors and strengthen their collective voice in promoting participatory, equitable, and sustainable development. The network plays a central role in coordinating advocacy efforts, building institutional capacity among its members, and facilitating collaboration across sectors. It has been instrumental in advancing civil society engagement in governance, policy reform, and grassroots development initiatives. Beyond its convening role, CODE-NGO is recognized for pioneering innovative approaches to development financing and partnership-building. Most notably, it led the creation of the Poverty Eradication and Alleviation Certificates (PEACe) Bonds in 2001, a groundbreaking initiative that

mobilized capital market resources for poverty alleviation and microfinance programs. The organization continues to support its members through training, knowledge-sharing, and access to financial and technical resources, helping strengthen the overall effectiveness of the NGO sector.

2. The **Worldwide Initiatives for Grantmaker Support (WINGS)** is a global network dedicated to strengthening philanthropy and social investment infrastructure worldwide. Established in 2000, WINGS brings together associations of grantmakers, philanthropic networks, and support organizations that work to enhance the effectiveness, accountability, and reach of giving. Its mission centers on promoting a more robust and enabling environment for philanthropy by facilitating knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and collaboration across countries and regions. Through convenings, research, and advocacy, WINGS supports its members in developing stronger institutions that can better address complex social challenges.

WINGS plays a critical role in connecting local and national philanthropy support organizations to global conversations on development. By fostering partnerships among foundations, civil society groups, and development actors, it helps bridge gaps between the Global North and South and encourages the sharing of best practices in grantmaking and nonprofit management. The network also contributes to shaping global policy discussions on philanthropy, including issues related to regulatory frameworks, cross-border giving, and sustainable development. Through these efforts, WINGS has become an important platform for advancing more strategic, transparent, and impactful philanthropy worldwide.

AF harnesses the power of networking and collaboration in pursuing developmental goals and objectives in the most impactful way possible

3. The **Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF)** is a Philippine nonprofit organization established in October 2001 to promote social development, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable growth, particularly in underserved and marginalized communities. It was created to manage and deploy resources from the PEACe Bonds to support poverty alleviation-focused programs. PEF provides grants, technical assistance, and capacity-building support to civil society organizations, cooperatives, and community-based enterprises, helping strengthen their institutional capacity to deliver lasting social impact.

Beyond funding, PEF emphasizes organizational strengthening, participatory development, and network-building. The foundation supports initiatives that improve governance, financial management, and social enterprise capabilities among partner organizations, while fostering collaboration between the private sector, local communities, and civil society networks. Through this holistic approach, PEF has played a vital role in fostering sustainable development, empowering grassroots organizations, and advancing inclusive growth.



CODE-NGO represents thousands of NGOs and people's organizations nationwide. (Photo from the CODE-NGO website)

4. The **Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS),** based in Hong Kong, is a leading research and advisory organization focused on improving the quantity and quality of philanthropic giving across Asia. Established in 2013, CAPS works with donors, foundations,

corporations, and governments to strengthen the region's social investment ecosystem. It is widely known for producing data-driven insights, including its flagship Doing Good Index, which assesses the regulatory and operational environment for philanthropy in Asian economies. Through research, policy engagement, and advisory services, CAPS aims to promote more strategic, accountable, and outcome-oriented giving.

CAPS also plays an important role in building bridges between the philanthropic, nonprofit, and public sectors in Asia. By convening regional leaders and facilitating dialogue, it encourages collaboration on pressing social issues such as education, health, and inequality. Its work emphasizes the importance of enabling environments for civil society, including supportive policies, transparency, and cross-border partnerships. Through these efforts, CAPS has emerged as a key platform for advancing effective philanthropy and strengthening social impact across the Asian region.

5.The **Partnership for Development Assistance in the Philippines, Inc. (PDAP)**, formerly the Philippine Development Assistance Programme, is one of the pioneering nonprofit intermediary organizations in the Philippines, supporting the growth, capacity, and effectiveness of NGOs and people's organizations. PDAP has historically channeled both financial and technical assistance to grassroots groups working in areas such as rural development, livelihoods, health, education, and governance, helping these organizations become more self-reliant and sustainable.

Beyond grantmaking, PDAP continues to emphasize capacity-building, participatory development, and institutional strengthening for its partner organizations. It provides training, organizational development support, and partnership facilitation, helping NGOs improve governance, accountability, and impact. The organization also collaborates with government agencies, international donors, and private sector partners to align resources and strategies for broader community development. Through its enduring commitment to network support and empowerment, PDAP remains a key contributor to the resilience and professionalization of the Philippine NGO sector.



FSSI supports sustainable agriculture in Benguet. (Photo from the FSSI website)

6.The **Foundation for a Sustainable Society, Inc. (FSSI)** is a nonprofit organization established in 1995 following a landmark debt-for-development swap between the Governments of the Philippines and Switzerland, which provided a counterpart fund that became its endowment. FSSI strengthens civil society organizations through strategic grantmaking, capacity-building, and social enterprise support. FSSI works with local NGOs, social entrepreneurs, and community-based organizations to promote sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and social innovation. Its programs often combine funding with technical assistance, aiming to enhance organizational effectiveness, financial sustainability, and long-term social impact. The foundation has become a key intermediary in the Philippine development ecosystem, connecting donors, NGOs, and local communities.

Beyond providing grants, FSSI emphasizes institutional strengthening and sectoral learning. The organization conducts training, knowledge-sharing workshops, and research to help civil society organizations improve governance, program design, and monitoring and evaluation practices. By fostering collaboration among philanthropic, corporate, and community partners, FSSI has contributed to building a more professional, resilient, and networked NGO sector in the Philippines. Its work underscores the importance of combining financial support with capacity development to achieve sustainable social outcomes. ■

4 STRENGTH FOR TOMORROW

The road ahead



LEAD to Serve participants working on group activities

A. Future focus: The work to be done



AF's ICARE Program Manager Gina Estipona

1. ICARE: Because climate change is real

"The beauty of this project," says Oman Jiao, "is that it's a compendium of resources for the environment." He is talking about Igniting Climate Action and Responsibility for the Environment (ICARE), an AF collaboration program born of the need to collectively address the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly the ones the Philippines is a long way from reaching, such as SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 13 (Climate Action). It's an urgent matter, and AF members know it; in the 2023 Network Aggregate Report, climate change ranked 10th among the top program areas, with 53 members investing P312 million on such projects.

With backing from the WINGS Lift Up Philanthropy Fund, AF set out "to enhance the capacities and increase the engagement of Philippine NGOs and foundations in the achievement of the SDGs, particularly on climate change, in collaboration with other key stakeholders," reads the brief for the project, which ran from November 2024 to October 2025.

The first step was to convene a Climate Action Core Group of AF members as well as experts on climate change, to provide guidance and technical inputs, and cover all the project stages.

The core group, a formidable multi-stakeholder advisory body, is chaired by Rodel D. Lasco, Ph.D, Executive Director of the Oscar M. Lopez Center for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management Foundation, Inc., and includes Jiao; Marilou "Malu" G. Erni, Chief of Staff and supervising Undersecretary for Strategic Communications of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources; Silvestre "Sly" Z. Barrameda, Jr., Executive Director of the National Resilience Council; Maria Victoria "Vickie" Tan, Chairperson of the Global Compact Network Philippines; Atty. Jose Andres "Onggie" A. Canivel, Executive Director of the Forest Foundation Philippines; and Glen A. de Castro, former Executive Director of the Gerry Roxas Foundation, Inc.

The second step was the science part, Estipona says: to conduct environmental scanning, or mapping existing collaboration mechanisms, strategies, and tools to get the lay of the land, as it were. This also safeguards against the duplication of efforts, and helps review lessons learned and "build on successful initiatives, including indigenous practices and innovative approaches," as the project brief says. "This activity will inform the capacity building interventions and lay the groundwork for potentially initiating or expanding multi-stakeholder partnerships."

The end result goes into the third step, developing a user-friendly and comprehensive digital compendium of resources that NGOs and foundations can use, with practical options, tools, and guides to concrete, applicable actions—such as, for example, reducing one's carbon footprint, in coordination with AF's partner networks.

There's also the "laymanizing" of climate science, "because it's very technical for non-experts. So, how can we relate this to our day-to-day life, and how can we communicate this to the communities and the sectors we work with?" Indigenous practices likewise offer a wealth of options, which tribes have been using to maintain their way of life for generations.

The final step is delivering the capacity building interventions needed by different groups, to be organized in partnership with various



Climate action core group members Oman Jiao, Gina Estipona, and Hana Superal of the Association of Foundations; Silvestre Barrameda Jr. of the National Resilience Council; Glen de Castro of the Global Compact Network Philippines; Undersecretary Marilou Erni of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources; Maria Victoria Tan of the Global Compact Network Philippines; Atty. Jose Andres Canivel of the Forest Foundation Philippines; and Dr. Rodel Lasco of the Oscar M. Lopez Center for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management Foundation

institutions, with the purpose of increasing the number of NGOs and foundations that include climate mitigation and adaptation in their work.

"Capacity building for climate management includes systematic thinking, risk assessment, solutions planning," adds Estipona. "Then there is climate science, communication, and then monitoring and evaluation. So, what do we measure in climate action? And how?"

The good news is that, although the project ended in October 2025, there is a clamor for the follow-through, so ICARE may yet have an extended life, reveals Estipona. "There's actually an appetite among the core group and participants for our capacity building activities. So they themselves are like, hey, *bitin* (not enough), this is just the beginning. In the words of Sir Rodel, we have just laid out the starting point."

2. ZeP2030: The continuing fight against poverty

Zero Poverty PH 2030 (ZeP2030, formerly known as Zero Extreme Poverty), another of AF's major collaborations, is a civil society-led coalition, with the goal of improving incomes and access to social services for 100,000 Filipino families by 2030, in line with SDG 1, No Poverty. The program approaches the problem in terms of economic development, education, health, and the environment.

According to the report "The Final Push to Poverty" by Francis Capistrano for ZeP2030, as of 2024, only 16 to 17 percent of targets are likely to be met, with SDG 1 in particular registering only marginal and moderate progress. Poverty is generally defined, Capistrano states, as insufficiency of income, deprivation of basic needs, lack of capabilities, insecurity and vulnerability, social exclusion, and the lack of rights and freedoms. For ZeP2030, poverty takes on several dimensions, encompassing not just livelihood and income, but education, health, the environment, and social protection.

According to statistics, the "official" poor in the Philippines live on P92 per person per day, or P462 for a family of five. For the subsistence level, that goes down to P319 per day for a family of five, or P64 per person. The first two indicators under SDG1 are to end extreme poverty, which means living below the international poverty line of US$3 (P57.9) a day, and cut the number of poor living on P92 a day by half. Yet, the forecast is grim: Based on the trend, about 7 percent of the world's population—that's 575 million people—will still be in extreme poverty by 2030.

In the Philippines, the greatest number of poor live in Mindanao, Eastern Visayas, Bicol, MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), and Negros Island. On average, the report reads, some P2,859 a month is needed for a poor family to rise from poverty. Such realities have been the impetus behind ZeP2030 since its inception.

"This began during the time of the late Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Dinky Soliman, Bishop Soc Villegas of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), and the late Ambassador Howard Dee of the Assisi Development Foundation, in 2016," recalls Jiao. "We wanted to uplift a million families out of poverty by 2030. At that time, in 2015, as per government data, about one million made up the extremely poor." ZeP2030



ZeP2030 general assembly

operated on a collective impact framework, which required a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

For Jiao, however, initial efforts revealed the glaring lack of baseline data to work with. "Not many NGOs actually do baseline, because it's expensive and laborious. But you need this to be able to say that you have accomplished something. You have the baseline, and then you have what comes after; you measure, and then you have evidence.

"That means you gather those that you have targeted and ask them, what do you want to happen in your life? Because if they don't want to participate, you can't force them. So again, that's the whole idea of community organizing, of asking, 'What are the needs? But what can you contribute? Because this cannot be doled out. You need to be included.'"

These needs can be more obvious than people think sometimes, says Jiao. For example, in one community, the children expressed that they could really use a school bus. "The mayor was there in that workshop, and you know what he said? 'If only I knew.' It could be as simple as a water system, or textbooks for children, or nutrition. Because when a child is hungry, how will he study?"

Revisiting and rebranding over the years, plus an interruption in the work brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a strategy review in 2024, moved the focus to a more doable 100,000 families out of poverty by 2030. "We had to ask, *sa totoo lang, ano ba ang kaya natin?* (really, what can we manage?) " says Estipona, who also manages ZeP2030 for AF.

There has been a lot of work with LGUs as well as national government agencies (NGAs), concentrated in four areas: coalition building, local convergence development, external stakeholder partnerships, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Local convergence development, in particular, has been essential to increasing local leadership and stakeholder engagement in poverty reduction. Such convergences take the form of multi-stakeholder efforts that can directly touch target families. "They're the ones on the ground, they're on the community level," says Jiao. "So when you increase the stakeholder partnership, it's not just you as an NGO; you should include the LGU, the private sector. Looking for a local convenor is not easy, but we wanted that."

"We support them, and they mobilize the other stakeholders, not just the CSOs," Estipona adds. "We encourage them to work with the LGU, with the regional offices of the national government agencies. That's the mechanism for implementing ZeP2030 on the ground." As secretariat, part of AF's work is to provide capacity building, and then help identify new convergence areas and local convenors.

Although ZeP2030 remains a loose coalition, memoranda of understanding are being signed in 2025 to delineate roles and responsibilities, Estipona says. "So the goal is 100,000 families with improved incomes and access to essential social services by 2030. And then the way we will measure that is through the thematic areas: education, livelihood, health and other social services."

There had to be a shift from national thematic clusters to "forging, forming, and supporting these

local convergences," Estipona says. "We had to shift, otherwise, *wala kaming mararating* (we won't get anywhere). We realized that implementation should be local, meaning provincial, municipal level. *Hindi pwede na yung mga* national organizations *lang yung nag-uusap*. (It can't be that just the national organizations are talking.) The action happens on the ground. But it was important to be able to assess and adapt."

Since its inception, ZeP2030 has successfully established local convergences in Quezon City, San Fernando City in La Union, Bulacan, Cebu, Bohol, Eastern Samar, Sarangani, Banaybanay in Davao Oriental, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Zamboanga Sibugay, Bukidnon, and Lanao del Sur. Plans are underway to expand to new areas. The program is spearheaded by 19 lead convenors, with Senen C. Bacani and Br. Armin A. Luistro, FSC as Co-Chairpersons, and AF and Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) as co-secretariats. Other than these two, the other lead convenors are Caritas Philippines, CODE-NGO, De La Salle Brothers, Foundation for a Sustainable Society, Inc., Foundation for the Philippine Environment, Forest Foundation Philippines, International Care Ministries, Jollibee Group Foundation, League of Corporate Foundations, Makati Business Club, Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies, Peace and Equity Foundation, Philippine Business for Education, Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas, UNILAB, United Nations Development Programme Philippines, and Zuellig Family Foundation.

"It's really a work in progress," concludes Jiao of the ZeP2030 program. "But if it were easy, then we would not have these problems anymore. The battle is always on the ground. Always."

"What we hope to see by 2030," says Estipona, "is to translate all of this support—even the building of capacities of the people's organizations, for example—into actual numbers of families that were uplifted.

"We also set another assessment in 2027 to see how we're doing. If we reach 100,000 or we're closer, then that's good. We can probably add more. If not, then let's see what adjustments are needed."

3. LEAD to Serve: A strong succession plan

Data from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in 2016 estimated the number of Philippine NGOs and people's organizations at some 164,000. Yet, continuity in leadership remains critical to the longevity and sustainability of any organization. While these groups face many problems in the society they exist in—lack of funding as well as greater accountability and expectations from donors among them—there is also the lack of next-generation leaders waiting in the wings, to be mentored by current foundation executives. In 2017, with support from the Peace and Equity Foundation, AF commissioned the "Study on Leadership Transition in the Philippine NGO Sector," described as "an initial step in building a body of evidence" in the field. This study would inform what would become AF's flagship program, Leaders Empowered and Dedicated to Serve through the NGO Sector (LEAD to Serve), with the ultimate goal of strengthening non-government organizations.

Joji Abot-Camelon, Program Manager of LEAD to Serve, recalls how she was recruited almost eight years ago by Oman Jiao from her previous job to precisely "have a handle on what we are really talking about. We conducted this study, and that's how we learned the magnitude, that it's actually this serious. Many of the members of AF were saying that they're too old already, but they cannot leave because they don't feel the organization is ready, or nobody is actually



MOA signing with supporters for the ZeP2030 program

prepared to take over the reins."

The study had revealed that, among other information, at that time, 65 percent of executive directors planned to leave within the next five years, 55 percent of NGOs had no leadership plans, and 45 percent had no identified successors among the group's ranks. It was a legitimate cause for concern; after all, the sector's role in safeguarding democracy, as well as in helping improve the lives of the country's poor and marginalized, is in the Constitution.

Studies on this vacuum had already been conducted in other countries, but the response in the Philippines has been limited to capacity building for specific skills of potential leaders within the organizations. From 1999 to 2002, CODE-NGO conducted a successor generation program, although this was short-lived due to lack of funding.

LEAD to Serve addresses the issue with three components: individual, which enhances each person's capacity; institutional, which means establishing better systems more applicable to the specific NGO; and sectoral, or opening discussions on common issues and adopting best practices and innovations from different sectors. The fourth component covers the sustainability and accessibility of the previous three.

In 2018, Abot-Camelon also put together the Philippine NGO Leadership Competencies Framework—"created by and for leaders, to guide its capacity building interventions," reads the LEAD to Serve brief—written for NGOs as well as NGO workers evaluating their own careers and growth within the organizations. "Through this, we hope to see our sector become better at nurturing and enhancing our talents' interest, openness, and readiness to take on leadership functions and continue the gains of previous and existing leaders," the framework reads. "My role is really trying to manage all the competency-based courses of AF," Abot-Camelon says. Since LEAD to Serve is eventually transitioning to becoming a full-fledged academy, her work also includes creating, designing, and conceptualizing new products.

As of 2025, LEAD to Serve has three course offerings. The LEAD to Serve Flagship Program is a 12-month curriculum focused on leadership and organizational development, involving assessments, planning, mentoring, and blended learning sessions. The program covers the Philippine NGO Leadership Competencies Framework's 10 competencies, and is for young Executive Directors and Deputy Executive Directors of NGOs as well as senior staff. There have been five batches of graduates since 2018, with Batch 6 set to graduate in 2026.

The LEAD to Serve Local Governance Engagement Program is the same as the flagship course, plus an added module on local governance to allow CSOs to be involved in local governance processes. "It is also LEAD to Serve, but with a special other objective," explains Jiao. "Because in the province, in the regions, we want the CSOs and the NGOs to be more engaged and active in local special bodies like the development councils. There is an appropriation for the NGO representatives." There are councils now for health, education, the environment, he says. Two batches in South Cotabato have completed the course since 2022.

Abot-Camelon says this program may have been encouraged by the 2018 Mandanas-Garcia Supreme Court ruling that apportions a bigger chunk of all national taxes to LGUs. This means greater decentralization and devolution of power, so LGUs are in touch with people and cognizant of their needs. The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), particularly in Region XII or Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City), had been interested in opening a CSO academy to help NGO workers adapt when AF's own LEAD to Serve graduates recommended the existing program, with a little tweaking for local governance. "Because we were ready, the DILG and the Department of Budget Management (DBM) said, okay, let's run that," Abot-Camelon recounts. "The idea was really for a CSO to learn to engage effectively." Thus, the program's target participants are CSO representatives recognized and accredited by LGUs.

Mahintana Foundation, Inc. in Polomolok, South Cotabato is one of the major partners of this program, along with the DILG, DBM, and LGU, as it is "very specific to South Cotabato," says Mahintana's Liza Lopez. "The DILG Central Office took it as a model, a best practice in the

Philippines. Many LGUs came, and other provinces in the region will be implementing the same." The seeds were sown in South Cotabato in particular, Lopez adds, because "our political leaders also modeled; *pinakita nila na malaki ang naitutulong ng mga* CSOs (they showed that CSOs could help a lot) in the delivery of basic social services in the province."

Finally, there is the LEAD to Serve Basic Program Management Course, a two-month online program focused on developing functional and leadership competencies in NGO program and project officers. To date, four batches have completed the course since 2023. "On that spectrum of program management competency, we are zeroing in on the project officer level," says Abot-Camelon. "So we target project officers or maybe even the assistants preparing to become officers, or new entrants to the sector. So we still have leadership competencies that we want to load into this functional competency, but basically 80 percent of the two months is really about program management."



LEAD to Serve Program Manager Joji Abot-Camelon

An academy in the pipeline

In the pipeline is the much-awaited LEAD to Serve Academy, whose design is being developed. The rationale has been that people, particularly the board and management of AF, have been seeing some early gains in the program, and wanted it scaled up, Abot-Camelon says. Still, she is cautious of the need to manage expectations. "It's more than the prestige of being called an academy, but the robustness, the spread of services and products that we can offer. It's trying to manage the current offering, and creating a headspace to transition and allow us to survive in the next couple of years. But there is already a meeting of the minds with the board and the team on how we want to move forward, what are our priorities, and that we're going to do it in tranches."

Also, with individual and institutional level of support covered by the courses, the sector level support came in the form of an innovative fund, modest grant funds from external sources for a CSO to "test" ideas applicable at the sector level, such as, for instance, the mental wellbeing of CSO workers and shared services among smaller NGOs, or holding "Conversations for Innovation" with the academe, business, and government on issues of common interest. Launching the academy means "reactivating" such sector-level support, which AF is unable to fund on its own.

As the main curriculum of the LEAD to Serve programs, the Philippine NGO Leadership Competencies Framework presents three clusters of 10 different leadership competencies. Under personal competencies, seen in work ethics that reflect one's personal values, are integrity and commitment to a purpose. The second cluster, the relational competencies meant "to deliver results with and through others to achieve the goal," includes strategic management,



More LEAD to Serve participants



Participants in the LEAD to Serve Local Governance Engagement Program

consensus building, communication, and governance support. The third cluster, managerial competencies, is about taking care of organizational functions to maximize efficiency, and covers talent management, financial management, project or program management, and administrative management.

Integrity, the very first competency on the scale, is foundational, Abot-Camelon says. "It is sort of the anchor. When you look at the definition of integrity, it anchors the person to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It anchors the person to the organization's vision, mission, and values. Other competencies are task-oriented; integrity is the heart of how you do things, why you do things."

A recent survey on developing the LEAD to Serve programs, reveals Abot-Camelon, posed the question to respondents: What's in it for you to actually explore training? "And the response was really more personal growth, more organizational development, and very much at the low levels when it came to getting promoted. So it gives you a sense that people are not in it just so they get better pay."

People must be convinced that joining the sector is "a feasible and attractive option for them, and the sector must be ready to take care of their needs," Abot-Camelon adds. "And when you talk about needs, you talk about a decent quality of life, about mental well-being, right? They're able to send their kids to school, feed their family. In my head, it's about having the system to be able to support a good way of attracting people, a good way of nurturing people, a good way of developing them, transitioning them."

Access and sustainability

The full LEAD to Serve course had 10 people in its pilot batch in 2018. The design was originally for in-person learning, but with COVID-19 came the need to adapt, which brought its own unexpected benefits. "There's also a need to balance accessibility, and I don't mean just financial," Abot-Camelon says. "It's also about a mother, for example, taking care of kids away from Metro Manila. So I have a participant telling me, if you had done this in person, I don't think I would have been able to go. So that doesn't just bring down the cost of the program, but gives equal chances for women." Today, two competencies are covered in in-person interactions, while the rest are tackled in both synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

The in-person part serves its purpose, as well, however, notes Oman Jiao. "That takes about four days, so they can get to know each other, and so that they will be able to build a community, as well as collegiality and friendship. Because at the end of the day, that's important, the support system." Like in any school, the participants have homework, assignments, and group work, but the course is not full-time. "They live their lives," Jiao says. "They work. They're in their respective NGOs."

AF aims to make the LEAD to Serve program sustainable. It is a paying program, with students investing in their education—as Abot-Camelon says, *"May taya din sila* (They have a stake)." In 2023, however, AF began offering partial scholarships to allows smaller member organizations with resource limitations to access

the training, as long as they are committed to maintain their memberships.

Other AF investments in the program have been hiring more staff and consultants, and working with other institutions, including schools and other AF members, willing to help fund the effort. The nearby province of Sultan Kudarat has also expressed interest in training CSO representatives in the area.

Four years after completing their course, an outcome evaluation was made in 2023 by the pilot batch of the LEAD to Serve Course, which began in November 2018 and ended after four months. They were described in the course evaluation as "a pool of highly competent and committed Philippine NGO talents attracted to and retained by their organizations, and interested to assume leadership functions." Ten NGO Executive Directors and Deputy Directors underwent an abbreviated version of the program: Maricar Asistio-Angeles, Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Philippines, Inc.; Anthony Badilla, formerly of Pondo ng Pinoy Community Foundation, Inc.; Erlynn M. Jaucian, formerly of Simon of Cyrene Community Rehabilitation and Development Foundation, Inc.; Maria Johanna Pia Ortiz-Luis, formerly of Cartwheel Foundation, Inc.; Ma. Bella Victoria Quimpo, Del Monte Foundation, Inc.; Christine Diane Romero, J. Amado Araneta Foundation, Inc.; Yasmin Mapua-Tang, Probe Media Foundation, Inc.; Ma. Pia Paz Gan-Uygongco, formerly of Uygongco Foundation, Inc.; Thieza Verdijo, Xavier Science Foundation, Inc.; and Ryan Vidanes, formerly of RD Foundation, Inc., currently with Conrado and Ladislawa Alcantara Foundation, Inc.

The outcome evaluation was guided by two main questions: "How has your LEAD to Serve experience helped you in dealing with the challenges/successes in the past four years, since the completion of your course?" and "What changed in terms of systems, practices, policies, and/or programs in your organization—or your other spheres of influence—that may be linked to your participation in LEAD to Serve?

'Other competencies are task-oriented; integrity is the heart of how you do things, why you do things'

In general, the evaluation noted, the LEAD to Serve Course allowed people to examine themselves as well as their external contexts, resulting in greater confidence in leading their organizations. In the words of participant Thieza Verdijo, "The constant sharing of experiences and mentorship among LEAD to Serve colleagues helped in building up my confidence, especially in handling management responsibilities." The turning inward led to much reflection and examination of their "whys," as well as reviewing where they were in their work as well as their reason for being, both as people and as NGO workers.

The course also clarified the participants' values in their personal and work life, with emphasis on integrity and commitment to purpose—the two first leadership competencies tackled in the course. "LEAD to Serve did not only affirm, but even strengthened my personal commitment to serving others through development work, and my personal belief that we could only be credible and effective in service if we not only work, but live with integrity," said participant Ryan Vidanes.

Notably, six participants in the pilot batch, namely, Pia Ortiz-Luis, Bella Quimpo, Diane Romero, Yasmin Mapua-Tang, Pia Uygongco, and Ryan Vidanes were elected and served on the AF Board of Trustees after being part of the program. ■



LEAD to Serve Batch 4 with mentors

'LEAD to Serve gave me the space to reflect and grow'

It's been a long, difficult journey from Smokey Mountain to a management role in a foundation that sends young people to school, but Ram Banzuela is well-equipped for the job

"My father is a jeepney driver, my mother is just at home, and we are four siblings," recounts Rameses "Ram" Banzuela Jr., 31, Career Development Program Manager for the Young Focus for Education and Development Foundation, Inc. "The idea that we should pursue an education wasn't instilled in us. I wasn't thinking about the future; I was thinking of doing something within the boundaries of my world at that time, which was Smokey Mountain. I thought of someday becoming a jeepney driver like my father. I was also introduced to scavenging at an early age."

Banzuela's story is proof positive that even with such difficult beginnings, opportunities and hard work can come together and transform a life. Although he started as a volunteer with Young Focus, which has a presence in Smokey Mountain, after he tagged along with a friend, he was eventually accepted into the program as a scholar in his second year of high school. "My parents were happy because the basic needs were already lessened—we were given school bags, uniforms, shoes. So, many expenses were off the list right away."

Banzuela was introduced to what could be possible through education, thanks to the workshops of Young Focus. He was also inspired by the scholars who came before him who graduated from college. "That's when I realized, 'Oh, it's possible to dream. I can pursue this.'"

It was not smooth sailing all the way, however. Banzuela recalls feeling lost while enrolled in his course at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines at age 16, "simply because of the difference between my background and that of my classmates. I didn't have the confidence to connect with other people at the time." He would go to school only with transportation money, not enough for food, much less the smartphones and other gadgets that young people had.



Ram Banzuela of Young Focus

It reached a point where Banzuela questioned if success was indeed possible. He dropped out of school, and found himself working with his father again, scavenging for copper from discarded electric wires, an enterprise which often left the family wanting for food. "It took me some time, almost a year, to get my motivation back. What became my turning point was the realization of my situation. My parents wanted me to do something with my life."

Banzuela returned to Young Focus in 2016—"No, they never kicked me out, and they were always checking on me," he says—this time as a member of the staff itself, while working on a degree in English, which he has yet to complete.

One reason for this pause in studies was yet another blow, the death of a close friend, with whom he had made a pact to finish their college degree. Sadly, his friend passed before they could begin their junior year.

In 2018, Banzuela joined the pilot batch of AF's LEAD to Serve Program Management Course. In 2025, he completed the year-long LEAD to Serve Program, an opportunity that came when he was transitioning to his current managerial role, which involves helping students move from education to employment through workshops, internships, and career readiness support.

The need for a succession plan was brought to the fore when Paul van Wijgerden, managing director of the foundation, which was established in the Netherlands, had a heart attack and had to slow down significantly. "My director is like a mentor, like a father to me," Banzuela says. "But I was learning slowly the reality of things. He's mortal." Eventually, as van Wijgerden works on this succession plan, he could eventually turn the reins over to Banzuela.

Banzuela says he learned, and continues to learn, many technical aspects of program management after his short LEAD to Serve course. The deeper, "major, major" lessons came with the year-long program, he notes. "The most important thing for me was understanding the self. It was surprising because, I thought there would be more financial, technical subjects. But after our face-to-face sessions, I realized how self-awareness was so important—understanding yourself as a leader, your strengths, your gaps, your style, and how you could improve." He learned about leading a team with empathy and clarity in one's goals and direction, and about how to make decisions, even in uncertainty. "We can only assess the risks, what's possible. In our student support program, students drop out. I experienced that myself. And when you're looking at it from a different perspective, you realize that what they're doing is hard, but you have to be able to process that."

Would he recommend the LEAD to Serve programs to other NGO workers? "Absolutely," Banzuela stresses. "You have to invest in people. Many people in NGOs have the heart to serve, but don't always have the structure or support to lead. LEAD to Serve gave me the space to reflect and grow."

Today, Young Focus supports some 600 scholars ranging from kindergarten to college students, while partnering with the Department of Education for Alternative Learning System programs. At the time of this conversation, Banzuela had just returned from a "mind-blowing" trip to the Netherlands, part of the foundation's succession plan to get him exposed to where the work began. "Even the title of the event was already a lot of pressure for me—'Meet the Future,'" he says with a laugh. "Then again, that future is not about me. It's about the young people that we serve—it's about ***their*** future. And I really believe in my heart that we are on the right path." ■



Banzuela (in cap) meets with some Young Focus beneficiaries.



Xavier Science Foundation, Inc.'s Thieza Verdijo

B. The next guard: Leaders on the rise

AS TIMES CHANGE and the needs of the people they work for evolve, so must foundations. The relevance of organizations that fill the gap between what the government is able to provide and what beneficiaries need to live decent lives remains.

"I think foundations are important because they keep other sectors honest," says Rory Tolentino. "Government, as we all know now with all that's happening, can be corrupt. Meanwhile, the private sector often has blinders: Is something like this going to give us more money? Sometimes, they don't look at the communities that they intersect with and say, how do we help these communities?"

"Foundations will always be around," says Liza Lopez of the Mahintana Foundation. "One of my learnings while sitting as a member of regional development councils is, *pinakikinggan yung boses ng mga* CSOs (the voices of CSOs are listened to), being representatives of the communities, the vulnerable, the marginalized. *Malaki yung tulong* (It's a big help) when we give feedback to the government, and the government listens, so that the plans and programs identified are suitable and responsive to the needs of the community."

"I always used to tell the staff that we have to deliver," says Marichu Lopez, on keeping a good foundation running. "We cannot commit what we cannot deliver."

1. Learning in the same boat

"Delivering" on work is a deeply-ingrained value in some of the younger current leaders of AF

member foundations that work in different fields. "Grooming, in a good way" is how Thieza Verdijo, Deputy Director and Administrative Officer of the Xavier Science Foundation, Inc. (XSF), laughingly describes how she was prepared for her managerial role, and how she may be "in danger" of running the 57-year-old organization one day. XSF was established by a Jesuit, Fr. William Masterson, in 1968, alongside Xavier University Cagayan de Oro's College of Agriculture and the Southeast Asia Rural Social Leadership Institute. "It started as a support organization to the university, or to the College of Agriculture in particular, in order to support students and scholars." Roel Ravanera is the foundation's current Executive Director as well as Vice President for Social Development at the Jesuit university. Verdijo herself joined the foundation in 2014 as administrative officer, before becoming deputy director in 2016.

'In Mindanao, working with indigenous people is the expertise or rich knowledge we can share, especially when it comes to the environment'

The foundation now has three core programs of focus: child protection and development, indigenous peoples and the environment, and sustainable food systems. They work closely with indigenous peoples, the Talaandigs and Manobos of Bukidnon, as XSF is particularly focused within the Mt. Kalatungan range. "Agriculture is pretty much the main livelihood in that area, and foundations like ours exist to support the communities that are not being reached by our government," says Verdijo. "We are the bridge for these communities to other institutions, like the academe. And that's a very important, difficult role."

XSF benefits from being a member of AF through the various activities, establishing networks with other groups they meet and interact with, and learning about their programs. "We find ways to collaborate with one another and explore how each of our organizations can work for a common program." XSF has done some consultancy with the Jollibee Group Foundation, for example, because of the latter's work with Xavier University on food security and vegetable farming, and with the Del Monte Foundation, for a project on payment for ecosystem services.

Meanwhile, XSF brings to the table its vast experience with local communities. "For us, in Mindanao, working with indigenous people is the expertise or rich knowledge we can share, especially when it comes to the environment, because AF is also shifting its work in that direction," says Verdijo, who has undergone training for AF's ICARE program.

Verdijo was also part of the pilot batch for the LEAD to Serve Program. "I was in my early years of being a deputy director, but I think Oman (Jiao) saw my potential at the time, and requested for me to be part of that pilot batch," she recalls. "That opportunity provided me with a lot of insights, and I grew to understand how other organizations or a network really worked."

Verdijo was actually the only deputy director in a batch of Executive Directors. "I learned a lot about the competencies being shared, but I did have that feeling of not quite being full-fledged. But I could also say that many of the decisions in XSF are now shared between me and our executive director, so as Oman told me, *tanggapin mo na* (accept it already)," she says with a laugh.

Her most important takeaway from that experience, aside from the actual knowledge, was the sharing of experiences among leaders, the Executive Directors. "While my perspective of Executive Directors was that they were up there, when I was learning together with the rest of my batchmates, we were really all in the same boat and experiencing the same things."

The pilot batch also established very close personal relationships because of their pioneering work. "We are more than classmates; we are friends who shared the same common experience and actually advise one another at the personal and even professional levels. So, *yun yung talagang nakapagpabago ng* perspective *ko* (that's what changed my perspective) on being in a foundation or an NGO network. Again, it's not easy when you want to help, but you do need a support group. And that solidifies how AF allows its members to bond together to work for a more common goal."

Those goals may need to be adjusted to the

changing times, says 43-year-old Verdijo, who studied development and communication at Xavier University's College of Agriculture. "At the time, agriculture was more on farming, technology. But this time, being part of the foundation allows me to understand that there are more underlying issues and concerns that we have to be part of. There is climate change; I'm here in Manila for the National Land Use Act (NALUA), and if you are talking of indigenous peoples, you cannot till without the proper land. The foundation has to adjust, and also learn, especially if an issue is not your focus or expertise. So in a way, you have to gather knowledge and enhance your skills. The flexibility should be there."

So what does it take to run a foundation today? "A lot of courage," says Verdijo. "A lot of innovation, I think. Learning, learning, sharing or collaborating with other institutions. It takes a genuine heart to serve others."

2. A 'work-in-progress' kind of leader

Con Estrella, 38, Executive Director of the Adarna Group Foundation, Inc. (AGFI), is actually a registered nurse by profession, with a master's degree in the field, and used to work in a government hospital. She has been with AGFI since its establishment in 2013, starting as a program coordinator, before becoming a program officer, officer in charge, and eventually Executive Director. AGFI is the corporate social responsibility arm of Adarna House and The Raya School, and has worked with LGUs to promote early literacy. To date, Adarna Group Foundation, Inc. has distributed 19,623 reading materials, supported 1,236 young learners, and trained 3,768 learning partners.

"Adarna House, our parent company, is the oldest publishing house of children's books here in the Philippines, and is on its 45th year in publishing," says Estrella. "*Yung aming pinakamantra* is, *bawat batang Pilipino nakakabasa* (Our mantra is, every Filipino child can read). That's in line with our parent company's vision and mission in terms of education and literacy."

AGFI has programs for children, healthcare workers, daycare workers, communities, and literacy advocates. "What we really do is capacitate the LGU through their healthcare



Adarna Group Foundation, Inc.'s Con Estrella

and child development workers and healthcare workers, because it's more sustainable, they're the ones in the community," says Estrella. "We empower them, we educate them, we provide training for them in terms of early literacy, reading readiness, as that's the core of our programs. *Kung ano man yung matututunan nila sa aming* (Whatever they learn from our) programs, that's directly applied in the child development centers they work in." The foundation is currently training more than 70 daycare workers, engaging more than 2,000 daycare parents, and runs 70-plus daycare centers. Implementation sites are in specific LGUs in Bataan and Tarlac, with a few in NCR. Partnerships have also brought their literacy programs to the Visayas and Mindanao.

Being part of AF has been a big thing—*"malaking bagay"*—in terms of networking for the organization, capacity building of members, and marketing programs, says Estrella. "It's an avenue for CSOs to promote their advocacy, and to meet new friends and possible partners." This



The Adarna Group holds educational, creative sessions with children.

proved true even during the pandemic, as AF made several webinars available, which made it possible to upgrade skills "so we are able to handle our organization and do our jobs better. AF also provided a very safe space to present and network." AGFI has worked with bigger foundations such as San Miguel Foundation, Inc. and the LBC Hari ng Padala Foundation, Inc.

Estrella also joined Batch 4 of the LEAD to Serve Program, after she finished yet another master's degree, this time in early childhood education, making her extremely well-equipped to lead her foundation in the mainstream of NGO work. "*Ang laki-laki ng* (It's a huge) role and opportunity for CSOs for the development of the country, *lalo na ngayon na mas nabibigyan ng pansin yung ginagawa ng mga* (especially now that more attention is given to the work of) organizations. To be honest, it's like bits and pieces of everything, because we have our own advocacies, we have our own strengths; we champion different initiatives. But I think those small pieces, maybe we don't feel the impact now, but they will have a good effect in the future.

'There are opportunities to make the development sector a better place. Mas may pwesto na siya sa lipunan'

"*Meron naman tayong* (we do have a) common goal," Estrella continues. "There are opportunities to make the development sector a better place. *Mas may pwesto na siya sa lipunan* (It has a place in society). As foundations, we just have to keep on doing what we do to stay relevant. *Kasi tingin ko, yung mga taong nagtatrabaho sa* (In my view, people who work in) foundations, they have this passion to help other people. As long

as you have this mindset that you're doing this for the greater good."

Estrella describes herself as a leader who is "very open in terms of communication. If there are comments, suggestions, and violent reactions, which you can't avoid, they can say it to me *nang hindi kinakabahan* (without being nervous)." It's also important to keep talking to stakeholders, to better craft and develop what needs to be done for these beneficiaries. Still and all, Estrella wisely sees herself as "a 'work-in-progress' kind of leader. I'm not the best leader, but I'm better than I was yesterday—because I know there's always room for improvement." ■

The foundation's goal, says Estrella, is 'in line with the parent company's vision and mission in terms of education and literacy.'



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