

## PHILIPPINE SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY CONVENTION OPEN FORUM

After the presentation of the first five papers read at the PSS National Convention the opportunity was given to the delegates in attendance to formulate questions or make comments during an open forum. Some of the attention given by delegates' comments was focused on the role of women among the urban poor in reaction to the paper by Anna Miren Gonzalez. Two statements in particular were singled out for comment: (1) Ms. Gonzalez citing Hollnsteiner's thesis that in a developing country, where resources are scarce, it matters little whether women hold the role of treasurer of household funds because it is poverty which decides where money goes; (2) the time consumed by lower class women in executing household chores could be otherwise spent in more productive measures such as gainful employment for the benefit of increased family income.

Remarks about the first statement emphasized that it seems that the lower class Filipino housewife fulfills an additional important role, that is in allocating of funds for family needs — without her husband knowing it often she supplements money to meet the deficiency in her spouse's salary. A suggestion was made that for future research it would be interesting to investigate where the supplementary funds come from.

The Saturday morning open forum turned out to be one of the more interesting sessions; it elicited a warm and lively response from the delegates over a wider range of issues. Gauging from the delegates' reactions evoked by the general topic of the four papers — rural poverty against man — this area can easily be considered one of the highlights of the convention. We will attempt to present the more salient comments and interventions in a brief synthesis. The six main points discussed in the open forum are listed below.

1. education and its relationship to increased chances of employment;

2. in view of the repeated government failures in rural programs, how then do we go about minimizing poverty;

3. the present assessment of the land reform program;

4. a critique that most of the presented papers are not following a prescriptive approach, that is, giving a concrete analysis of the present situation based on a moral foundation of society. Dr. Rocamora's paper is cited as utilizing a prescriptive presentation or analysis;

5. the fit of the economic-bound poverty threshold concept with the quality of life concept. The Bicol River Basin Project research data gives support to the hypothesis that house construction materials used as a rough indicator of quality of life, highly correlates with income;

6. further research on the extension of rural electrification should give indications of how extensively poor farmers benefit from electrification in comparison to those with more resources.

The first three points of delegates' discussion deserve further elucidation. Ms. Jeanne Illo's observations on the relationship between improving education and increased job opportunity sparked comments about her views which express an important and marked departure from statements found in the literature. Ms. Illo warns that by continually speaking of the educated unemployed only in terms of those who have finished a college degree we are by-passing the greater majority in the middle educated level who do not benefit from the sheepskin effect.

Dr. Lynch's research on Bureau of the Census and Statistics shows that eventually college graduates do make out better than those who did not finish college. Those who do not finish at any level are the critical group. A second point, in relation to education and employment, is that it is not enough to multiply jobs but the wage level needs to be raised. Not only do we recognize unemployment as a problem

but it seems that 60 percent of the workers are below the poverty threshold. The so-called Lawrence curve of income distribution in the Philippines gives a clear and unambiguous bias showing too much income in the hands of a few which indicates that one of the major problems for this country is income re-distribution. A practical consequence is to take a hard, closer look at wage levels and for salary increases to take place first, among the lowest ranks. An experiment of this type is taking place at the Ateneo de Naga.

And, lastly, as far as the discussion on education is concerned, interest was expressed as to whether the desire for education among the rural people is either an expression of a felt need or the response to a communication bias. Ms. Carmen Santiago's study seems to indicate that rural people's quest for education is more of a response to what is communicated to them — they study in order to get a job and not to acquire an education for its sake. Indications seem to point to more responses to communication.

The next two points of the discussion on the rural poverty situation are in direct relation to conclusions drawn from Dr. Rocamora's paper. First, in view of the many failures of the government's rural development programs a reassessment should be undertaken in terms of goals and perspectives and should reflect the following: (1) less emphasis placed on productivity at the expense of other rural goals; (2) peasants should be more respected; it is time to stop ascribing to them mostly negative attributes and mostly viewing their attitudes as destined, to be changed; (3) if the very normal processes of Philippine society can be proven economically and socially to cause poverty then serious reconsiderations are needed. Secondly, factors to be considered in an evaluation of the Land Reform program are the number of hectares which have reached the stage Five level, the number of tenants involved and the time lapse since the present program was first initiated. As of November 1975 only 30,000 hectares are included which represents only 2 percent of the total program of 1.4 million hectares. The number of tenants is only 14,000

out of a total of 1,070,000. The third factor which can give some idea of the success or failure of the program is the time lapse of four years, October 1972-January 1976.

In Sunday's open forum the delegates expressed serious concern on the commitment of a social scientist in the present national context. Some conveyed with deep sincerity the frustration and bewilderment in front of a so-called dilemma between the responsibility to the objectivity of the science without impinging upon the commitment and responsibility as a citizen of the country and vice-versa. An exchange of views established that the social scientist must be more concerned that his or her data is helpful to develop the people in the study rather than the people who control the grants. There was a general preoccupation that the social scientist be more fully committed to the people, not necessarily or only in the action-orientation but also and more so in the data-gathering and analysis phases of the research. Two concrete suggestions were shared with the delegates as the expression of the role of a social scientist committed to people. The first would be to subject the findings of the research to the people themselves. The report could be discussed by the people through a series of seminars in order to have them share in the decisions. The second suggestion goes one step beyond the former and should perhaps be mentioned first since it refers to evolving some kind of a training scheme to allow the people to participate in the research. To develop less elitist ways of data-gathering which, with the proper consultation, the people can handle and actually operationalize. These suggestions were seriously considered and it was pointed out that more sociologists and anthropologists on the Philippine scene are fruitfully exploring such attempts not only in urban research but in the rural areas as well.

#### *Note*

This summary of the Open Forum was written by Joseph Vancio, research associate, Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University.