

National Social Science Congress **By Joanne Agbisit**

Towards the 1980s, Filipino social scientists envisioned a more active role for PSSC in nation-building, as expressed in PSSC's *Agenda for the 1980s*. The National Social Science Congress (NSSC) was conceived with this vision in mind. The NSSC, designed as a quinquennial activity, was intended to serve as a platform for Filipino social scientists to interact and forge ties, share their latest research, and discuss socially-significant issues with other sectors of society.

The First NSSC was held on 17-19 November 1983 at the newly-built Philippine Social Science Center. Quite fittingly, the focus of the First NSSC was Philippine social sciences itself. Themed "Towards Excellence in Social Science in the Philippines," the First NSSC sought to examine the state of social sciences in the country as well as to formulate plans to foster the development of Philippine social sciences. In preparation for the congress, PSSC held a series of roundtable discussions on social science structures, instructional policies and programs, research and extension, human resource development and institution-building, and research dissemination and utilization, the results of which were presented in the congress proper. This pioneering event was a huge success, the keynote given by then University of the Philippines President Edgardo Angara and attended by academics and representatives from government institutions, business sector, and civic organizations.

For the Second NSSC held five years later in 24-26 November 1988, PSSC chose the theme "*Social Sciences and Economic Recovery*." PSSC leadership believed this to be a timely theme in view of the economic challenges faced by the newly-installed Aquino administration. During the pre-congress roundtable discussions, social scientists engaged representatives of government in an extensive discussion of national economic programs and policies such as agrarian reform and privatization of economic sectors, as well as related issues impinging on economic progress (e.g. governance, local autonomy, education). The salient points and recommendations raised from these discussions were presented and further discussed during the congress proper attended by almost 300

participants from different sectors and institutions. The proceedings of the congress were published in the 1988 issue of the *PSSC Social Science Information*.

“Empowerment and Accountability for Sustainable Development: Towards Theory Building in the Social Sciences” was the topic of the Third NSSC held on 9-10 December 1993. In this congress, Filipino social scientists tackled the issue of sustainable development, one of the key policy thrusts of the Ramos Administration. The 350 congress participants examined the impact of major economic programs on Philippine environment and natural resources, and discussed the existing strategies employed by government to balance its aspirations of NIChood and environmental protection. One of the main outputs of the congress was the formulation of theoretical frameworks to gain a better understanding of the processes needed to bring the country closer to attaining the goal of sustainable development. Aiming for a wider circulation of the congress papers, PSSC soon after published the congress papers in one volume entitled *Empowerment and Accountability for Sustainable Development: Towards Theory Building in the Social Sciences*.

The Fourth NSSC, held on 8-9 July 1998, picked up where the First NSSC left off. Fifteen years after the First NSSC came up with recommendations to advance social sciences in the Philippines, PSSC once again decided to look inward and take stock of developments in the social sciences. Themed *“The Philippine Social Sciences in the Life of the Nation,”* the Fourth NSSC featured the history and development of all 13 social science disciplines; looked into the relationship of the social sciences with other branches of knowledge (e.g. agriculture, health and medicine, law, management); and reflected on their role in policymaking. The Fourth NSSC was especially significant as it was held as part of the National Academy of Science and Technology’s (NAST) Annual Scientific Meeting. It marked the first time that the NAST featured and gave special attention to the social sciences in its annual meeting. A record 512 participants attended the congress proper. The papers presented in the congress were published in two volumes: *The Philippine Social Sciences in the Life of the Nation (Volume 1): The History and Development of Social Science Disciplines in the Philippines*, and *The Philippine Social*

Sciences in the Life of the Nation (Volume 2): Enriching Each Other: The Encounter of the Social Sciences and Other Branches of Knowledge. The keynote speeches delivered by guest speakers during the opening of the pre-congress symposia and the congress proper were published separately in the January-June 1998 issue of the *PSSC Social Science Information*.

The Filipino youth was the focus of the Fifth NSSC held on 15-17 May 2003. PSSC aimed to bring together social scientists and individuals and groups involved in youth concerns and programs to talk about their research and/or work on the Filipino youth. PSSC thought this to be a relevant topic given the greatly changed environment of the 21st century brought about by the twin phenomena of technological revolution and globalization. Three publications were prepared by PSSC to serve as background materials for the congress: (a) *The Filipino Youth: Some Findings from Research* which gives an overview of the areas that had been covered by youth research and the findings/conclusions drawn from these studies; (b) *The Filipino Youth: A Statistical Profile* which presents some basic statistics on the country's youth population; and (c) *A Guide to Studies on the Filipino Youth: 1960-2003* which compiles the titles of Filipino youth studies in the last 40 years. The congress was composed of 25 panel sessions/fora, the most popular of which were those on the youth and the new ICTs, reflections of past student leaders, and the language of youth.

The preliminary findings of PSSC-UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines study on youth transitions were also presented in one panel session. Over 300 participants attended the Fifth NSSC, keynoted by Dr. Reynaldo Vea, a renowned scientist and educator and former youth activist. PSSC published the keynote address, select papers and discussions, and synthesis of the congress in two special issues of the *PSSC Social Science Information* (January-June 2005 and July-December 2004). The salient points and findings in the Fifth NSSC served as inputs to the Philippine country paper for the 15th AASSREC Biennial General Conference held in November 2003 which had the theme "Asian Youth in Transition."

The latest NSSC, convened on 7-9 May 2008, dwelt on the topic “*The Paradox of Education and Education Reform: Social Science Perspectives.*” Unlike previous conferences on education, the Sixth NSSC deliberately sought to use the theories, methods and analytic tools of the different social science disciplines to analyze the nature and status of the country’s educational system and educational reform processes. In line with this, PSSC’s disciplinary members contributed panels tackling different aspects of Philippine education using the lens of their respective disciplines. In addition to the disciplinary panels, two special plenary sessions were organized, “Education and Education Reform: Experiences and Reflections from the Asia-Pacific Region” which featured leading scholars from the Asia-Pacific Region, and “Reforming Education: Reflections of Social Scientists as University Presidents” which comprised of trained social scientists currently serving as presidents of Philippine universities. The keynote address was delivered by Academician and current PSSC Chairperson Allan B.I. Bernardo. Some 223 participants from various sectors attended the congress. PSSC expects to publish select papers of the congress before year-end 2008.