

A close-up portrait of Edgardo D. Gomez, a middle-aged man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a suit and tie. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a thoughtful expression.

The impact of ED GOMEZ

by Miguel Azcuna

Edgardo D. Gomez is a name often associated with marine science in the Philippines. Early streaks of his excellence were evident when he graduated with a double degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science and a Bachelor of Science in Education, from De La Salle University with recognition as *summa cum laude* and a gold medal for general excellence. Further graduate studies led to an MSc in Biology from St. Mary's University in Minnesota and a PhD in Marine Biology from the prestigious Scripps Institute of Oceanography of the University of California in San Diego.

Dr. Gomez broke new ground in the 1970s upon the inception of the Marine Sciences Center of the University of the Philippines with him as the founding director. With assets amounting to no more than two sheets of paper, he developed it into what is known today as the UP-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) by recruiting staff that embodied the same virtues that he deemed important—honesty, openness, and collegiality. Furthermore, his optimism, determination, and self-confidence were crucial in overcoming the usual hurdles that accompany the task of institution-building. After two decades of hard work, UP-MSI was recognized as the National Center of Excellence in the Marine

Sciences (Presidential Proclamation No. 518/1994) and subsequently as the first and only Center of Excellence (COE) in Marine Science under the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) COE scheme of promoting and rewarding scientific excellence. By 1998, the institute had produced 20 ISI-indexed publications yearly, averaging 1.2 per senior

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staff. One of the institute's strengths was its ability to draw research funding from national and international sources. It was the first institute to have all of its faculty with doctoral degrees and publishing in ISI-indexed journals. In 2004, MSI was designated as one of the

international Centers of Excellence by the Global Environment Facility (GEF)/World Bank Project on Coral Reef Targeted Research and Capacity Building for Management. With this, the UP-Bolinao Marine Laboratory in Bolinao, Pangasinan which Dr. Gomez had built in the mid-80s, became an important hub for international coral research, and the facility was upgraded with a PABX telephone system and broadband internet to facilitate communication between researchers and international contacts. Vital equipment for scientific research was also acquired; a number of graduate students continue to receive support under this program. Indeed, Dr. Gomez's vision, patience and dedication helped put the Philippines on the center stage of marine science research.

Dr. Gomez did extensive research on commercially important invertebrates in the first two decades of his scientific career. Various publications with his graduate students formed the basis for subsequent

mariculture work by young scientists on threatened species. A natural development from this was his research on giant clams in the context of a regional program involving several countries. More recently, this led to the investigation of the effectiveness of giant clam restocking in reef rehabilitation alongside coral transplantation (Gomez and Mingo-Licuanan 2006, Cabaitan et al. 2008). He literally saved *Tridacna gigas* populations in

the Philippines from extinction by understanding the life cycle of the giant clam and applying the knowledge to culture spat to juveniles in laboratory tanks, and subsequently releasing adult specimens in coral reefs. This sparked interest among several private and public entities that were keen on developing giant clam ocean nurseries. For example, one such nursery was built in 2002 at the Hundred Islands National Park in association with the Philippine Tourism Authority. Dr. Gomez also received a fellowship grant from 2002-2005 to study the effectiveness of giant clam restocking to remediate coral reefs that had been reduced to rubble from blast fishing.

Furthermore, Dr. Gomez's research on coral farming is a veritable wealth of knowledge. He adopted the 'gardening concept' of active rehabilitation to remediate degraded coral reefs in Bolinao, Pangas-

inan. This action-based method of conservation was believed to be more effective than passive conservation in saving coral reefs, the latter simply protecting and leaving a degraded reef to regenerate on its own. His recent experiments on coral farming studied several species and associated genotypes to assess which corals would survive better on different substrates (Shaish et al. 2007). Coupled with economic data, like the cost of materials and man hours to employ such rehabilitation, Dr. Gomez's research continues to be people-oriented.

He has received numerous awards, both before and after becoming a member of the National Academy of

Science and Technology, among them the UNEP Global 500 Roll of Honour, the Presidential *Lingkod Bayan* Award, and the University of the Philippines Concepcion Dadulfa Award for Distinguished Achievement. These awards are testimonials to his outstanding leadership in the Marine Science Institute and the Filipino scientific community.

With over 130 technical publications in his resumé, this man is a symbol of hard work and dedication. It is no surprise that many future scientists and biologists perceive him as a man of honor and achievement. What I find particularly noteworthy about him is his ability to apply experiences learned from science to the benefit of local fishing communities. Reef restoration is integral in setting up marine sanctuaries that aim to increase

fish yield in such communities, which are home to many Filipino homes and hearts. It is this interaction between science and people that makes him stand out in Philippine science, and I believe he will always be remembered because of this.

References

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One of Dr. Gomez's coral transplantation projects, together with a giant clam that was restocked in the area.