



Elvira C. Ablaza
President/CEO, Pacific Rim
Innovation and Management
Exponents Inc. (PRIMEX)
Poverty Alleviation with a Twist

IN 1989, when Inland Resources Development Corporation (IRDC), a consulting firm, folded after seven years of existence, Elvira C. Ablaza set up the Pacific Rim Innovation and Management Exponents (PRIMEX), also engaged in consulting. What the company has done with its very existence is actually merge business fervor with social care, with PRIMEX able to win multimillion contracts even against giant foreign competitors in Europe and the US, and by so doing, successfully implements projects



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that promote poverty alleviation in the Philippines.

Ablaza actually started to teach college courses in biology, zoology, and botany for her alma mater, the College of the Holy Spirit, where she graduated with a bachelor in science degree in biology (magna cum laude), when in 1976, she received a pre-employment thesis grant from the Aquaculture Department (AQD) of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC). In 1977, after defending her masteral thesis leading to a Master of Science in Biology (major in ecology) at the University of Santo Tomas (UST), she was subsequently hired by SEAFDEC as a research assistant at the Freshwater Fisheries Station in Binangonan, Rizal.

In 1980, Ablaza was nominated by SEAFDEC, and selected by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN/FAO) from a field of 200 nominees from all over the world as the first recipient of an FAO Professional Fellowship on the Fisheries Aspects of Integrated River Basin Development in Rome, Italy. "In the six-month period of my fellowship in FAO, I had the opportunity to work with inland fisheries and aquaculture specialists who would later engage my services as a consultant for different assignments in Southeast Asia," Ablaza recalls.

Subsequently, Ablaza established PRIMEX.

Initially only a 25-man group with 50 consultants engaged in various projects, PRIMEX's database now contains the names of 2,000 consultants. "The success story of PRIMEX has to be my biggest achievement. From a small space at the rear section of my ancestral home in Sampaloc, Manila in 1989, PRIMEX was able to acquire a 360 square meter condominium unit in the Ortigas area in 1992. From working as the local associate of international consulting firms in its earlier years, PRIMEX has been serving as lead firm or prime contractor for development projects in the Philippines and 16 other countries in the Asia-Pacific region," Ablaza says.

But Ablaza believes that while PRIMEX has already established an enviable reputation with international financing institutions, and public and private sector clients in the Philippines and overseas, based on its consistently outstanding performance in projects it designed and managed, the biggest challenge for the company is on how to maintain its position as a premier international consulting firm. "(We are) faced with the changing trends in the consulting industry including the emergence of new firms and change in priority investments of clients," she says.

Aside from the ADB, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank, and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) are PRIMEX's top clients.

The satisfaction in Ablaza's job comes from knowing what she does make lives better. Last year, for example, one of the projects PRIMEX handled for ADB was on fighting HIV and AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, which seeks to strengthen country response to HIV and AIDS among two highly vulnerable population groups: intravenous drug users and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

Currently a fellow of the Royal Institute of Agriculture in Singapore, and fellow of the Society of Philippine Accredited Consultants, Ablaza is actively involved with the Confederation of Filipino Consulting Organizations of the Philippines (COFILCO) and its fight to "make the procurement process of consulting services transparent and less subject to improprieties," she says, having been a past president of COFILCO, and the first woman to serve in that capacity since the organization was established about two decades ago.

"I have always believed in quality, excellence, and professionalism as keys to success in any field, and that includes consulting, in particular," Ablaza says. "No matter how successful a company may be, I believe that there is always scope for association and collaboration to attain even more success." ●