

## **Laidlaw Summer II Summary**

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In Summer II of my experience in the Laidlaw Scholars Program I set out to expand on the research I had conducted from Summer I by collecting data for cyclical analysis on the sachet economy in the Philippines. I proposed to complete guided surveys and an empowerment workshop with informal waste workers and scavengers, culminating in a report that could help inform future policy improvements to the sachet, and waste management system. With the support of the Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation, Inc. (PRRCFI) I was able to complete these tasks while supporting their activities throughout the months of July and August.

The sachet economy is a marketing strategy employed by multinational corporations to infiltrate even the most impoverished of households in countries of the Global South, such as the Philippines (Sy-Changco et al., 2011). Last summer, I conducted semi-structured interviews and Photovoice methodology with sachet-consumers and *sari-sari* store owners in the Philippines virtually. While this was incredibly fruitful and allowed me to extrapolate key trends and patterns hidden from the current literature, I found there was great opportunity in surveying informal waste workers and scavengers for their close relationship with the waste management system. Throughout this summer, I also worked with PRRCFI to complete my deliverables while taking part in and aiding their work. For example, I helped paint one of their project outputs, attended meetings, and helped take photos during their events. I was humbled by the opportunity to not only support an organization whose values in conservation and sustainability align with mine, but also one which I have become familiar with through their care for and support of my research. Furthermore, my research responsibilities included: translating survey questions, conducting the surveys, researching ideas for the workshop, practicing ideas for the workshop

and making prototypes, and finally facilitating a workshop which could create an additional livelihood source for participants.

I greatly enjoyed my weekly tasks and the routine I had developed over the course of the summer. It should be noted that during my first week in the Philippines, I sat down with my PRRCFI correspondents to write out a schedule for my research activities which we later followed. Thus, my week's activities were often planned in advance. Nonetheless, each particular day often varied in purpose and involved a mix of activities. For example, during the first half of one of my days I may have had a meeting to attend with PRRCFI, helped acquire materials for an event, or took part in painting for a project. We often had lunch at a local *karinderya* (eatery) which became one of my favourite parts of the day. The *karinderya* was a significant and familiar part of my memories of the Philippines, as well as a vital part of the authentic experience of Filipino life. Periodically throughout the week, I would find myself reviewing relevant literature on the sachet economy and reflecting on my discoveries from Summer I to help inform my present execution of research. A significant part of the process was also translating the survey questions I had outlined in my proposal. I sat down with a couple of my correspondents at PRRCFI to translate the questions from English to Tagalog to Hiligaynon. In order to optimize my abilities as a leader of the research project, especially for activities such as this, I prepared by reading Filipino short fiction and poetry. I was thus quite pleased by my ability to collaborate with my correspondents to convey the meaning of the English questions accurately in Tagalog, so they could translate them to the local dialect of the city in which I conducted my research (Hiligaynon). To expand on my skills, I continued reading Filipino literature throughout the week, and purposefully spoke in Filipino when possible. During the week we conducted surveys, I also visited the dumpsite where the participants worked to meet

them. It should be noted that in order to engage in research activities, I learned to familiarize myself with the area I was staying in during spare hours. Furthermore, as planned in the schedule, I conducted surveys with one of the PRRCFI correspondents who acted as a translator, and maintained a field research journal to keep track of study progress. In the latter half of my summer, the workshop became the main deliverable of concern. Thus, aside from meetings with PRRCFI, I focused my work on researching ideas for how sachets could be repurposed by the informal waste workers and scavengers. I then used sachets collected by the informal waste workers to test out some of my ideas and develop prototypes which could be used during the workshop as models during the lesson. As part of this, I worked to create an efficient, effective, and accessible method for cleaning the sachets. Toward the end of the summer, I then conducted the workshop with participants.

As noted in my Summer II reflection, I developed key leadership skills in passion, humility and cemented my personal relationship with the notion and act of leadership. In the following section I outline how I specifically achieved my SMART goals to develop my *Leadership Abilities, Research & Project Management, and Skills and Social & Cultural Intelligence & Awareness.*

Firstly, I developed my leadership abilities through my very leadership of the empowerment workshop. For the best interests of the participants and the study, I needed to empower and trust myself prior to leading the workshop. There was a certain insecurity I had not in my abilities to lead a group in accomplishing a task, but my ability to do so as an outsider from this world. I was worried that in creating and designing this session to upcycle sachets, it would seem as if I was doing it as a performance. The participants interact with sachet waste every single day, and use sachets, and live in a world of sachets. I was proposing an idea that I

thought they might find silly, especially given that my everyday life is so far removed from the sachet economy. Furthermore, I spoke in both English and Tagalog during the session to make it easier to follow, the latter of which I am comfortable with but still struggle to articulate certain concepts in. When it came to teaching people how to craft specific designs, I did find myself stuttering or simply unable to convey my thoughts as I would if I was speaking completely in English. During the session I had to keep note of this, and overcome my embarrassment to come to the conclusion that being a leader means understanding that your relationship with those you lead is reciprocal. As much as I had worries and insecurities, I also remained cognizant of the fact that my position as a researcher put me at a certain level of distance from the participants. In order to foster this reciprocity, it became my responsibility as the leader to take an objective stance and focus on the participants' successful accomplishment of the designs.

Secondly, I began developing my *Research & Project Management* skills during the preparation and coordination phase with PRRCFI. We immediately began laying out my tasks, and main deadlines upon my arrival in the Philippines. This was vital given the rigorous schedule of PRRCFI, and the large project they were carrying out while I was there. As changes in the schedule arose, I had to adapt my personal deadlines for research tasks to accommodate participants, and different circumstances while maintaining a level of peace with the idea that even well-managed studies will never occur exactly as planned.

Finally, the skill I developed the most was *Social & Cultural Intelligence & Awareness*. While I am deeply connected to this study because of my Filipino background, I conducted my research in a region of the Philippines (Visayas) which speaks a completely different dialect and has different social dynamics from my island of origin (Luzon). I found this to be a key source of my surprising culture shock. I anticipated my return to the Philippines to be different but familiar

in the same way I know Luzon. Thus, there was a unique discomfort I felt in being in a country where many brands are familiar to me, restaurants feature familiar faces, and certain cultural practices are similar, yet I could not understand any of the written or spoken words. I felt as though I was in some in-between land where I was neither at home nor alien. I paced myself in the adjustment, spending a few days acquainting myself with the city and its neighbouring towns. A key part of this adaptation was embracing the differences Visayas had from my home of Luzon, especially as a method of preparing myself for my interactions with participants. It was important to me that I did not allow my familiarity with Luzon to sway my experiences in Visayas, and as such I learned Hiligaynon words and some of the city's history. At the end of the summer, I found myself enjoying the slow-paced nature of this region, and appreciated the opportunity to exist within it, as I never had even when I was living in the Philippines. Furthermore, as my study is focused on the sachet economy as a Filipino sociocultural phenomenon, I had to set aside what I knew about the sachet economy from the literature to give space to the participants who had firsthand experiences with it. The highly academic lens through which I previously viewed sachets was vital to the design of the study but I had to learn how to use it to guide my work without judging my experience of sachets directly in the Philippines. In a surprising sense, I learned to appreciate the sachet when observing it from the perspective of the Filipino living life in the Philippines. From this place of understanding, I could conduct the research without imposing my own views or expectations of what the results should be.

My experiences in Summer II have successfully allowed me to achieve my SMART goals while creating surprising outputs, and unveiling a bounty of insights informing my results from

Summer I. I look forward to further developing this research and hope this is the beginning of the expansion of sachet economy literature to a people-centered policy approach.

## References

Sy-Changco, J. A., Pornpitakpan, C., Singh, R., & Bonilla, C. M. (2011). Managerial insights into sachet marketing strategies and popularity in the Philippines. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 23(5), 755-772. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13555851111183129>