

GLOBAL INITIATIVES AND GOVERNMENT EFFORTS IN POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE PHILIPPINES: A REVIEW

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Abstract

This article explores the global initiatives and government efforts to address poverty reduction programs, especially the *Pantawid Pamilya* in the Philippines in order to build a guided global-to-local perspective in poverty reduction. The author shows in this paper poverty reduction initiatives from the global to the national to the provincial government. The author points out that local efforts to address poverty reduction need to be aligned with and, in fact, rooted on global targets as well as national targets within pre-determined timeframe as shown in the *AmBisyon Natin 2040* and the Philippine Development Plan of 2017-2022. The implementation of the *Pantawid Pamilya*, or 4Ps, from the national government to the local government units have been monitored through impact evaluations which is a strong display of the government agencies' strong commitment towards eradicating poverty in the Philippines. The Philippines as a nation has responded to the call towards combatting poverty, and efforts to curb the poverty rate within the next generation of Filipinos is clear even as early as today.

Keywords: Global Poverty, Pantawid Pamilya, Philippines, Poverty Reduction, 4Ps

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty is everybody's concern; thus, everyone is hoped to intervene. Globally speaking, how much have we accomplished to combat global poverty? The bulk of studies on poverty in a global perspective is enormous that makes it nearly impossible to trace how global poverty is addressed by each country as an individual community. In the case of the Philippines, the idea becomes more complex if not totally chaotic when the governed would seldom appreciate the initiatives of the government in addressing poverty in general. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to explore initiatives in addressing poverty in the Philippines and set future strategic directions for future poverty reduction programs of the country. When it comes to poverty, two important concepts or lines of thought could be found, namely, Poverty as a personal failing, and Poverty as a structural failing. Poverty as a personal failing tells us that a person is poor because of his or her personal traits, i.e. these traits cause his or her poverty. These traits could range from laziness up to educational levels. Thus, there appears a need to look into the profile of poor people or members of the 4Ps whether or not their demographic variables are in a way contributory to their poverty. On the other hand, poverty as a structural failing tells us that a person is poor, not because of his or her personal traits, but because of failure at the structural level, i.e. failure in social and economic aspects of the area or locality where he or she lives in. These structural failures could include failure of the national or local government to provide a proper number of jobs which could pay enough to keep families out of poverty. Thus, there appears a need as well for the local government to monitor and evaluate poverty reduction programs like 4Ps to resolve issues when needed.

In the report of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, or JICA, in March 2004 entitled 'Approaches for Systematic Planning of Development Approaches: Poverty Reduction', Chapter 2, the report included four (4) development objectives for poverty reduction, which includes the following: [1] political and socio-cultural capability, [2] economic capability, [3] human capability, and [4] protective capability. According to JICA, to reduce poverty, the capabilities of the poor should be strengthened

through improving the environments surrounding the poor and by cutting the vicious cycle of poverty. This means evaluating the extent to which poverty has been resolved among the poor is one prime consideration in poverty reduction program.

As early as 2012, impact evaluation for the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, or 4Ps, has been in place. In its Evaluation Methodology of the 4Ps Impact, the following were undertaken: [1] rigorous evaluation using a study unit and a counterfactual, [2] randomization of the respondents for equal chance of being included in either the study unit or counterfactual, [3] comparison of mean of both the study unit and the counterfactual, and [4] use of key informants through interviews or focus group discussions to collect information on the immediate locality and on the health and education of the sample population whenever accessible. However, it was also true that impact evaluation would take time and is not simply gathering data through survey.

The World Bank and Global Poverty

The mission of the The World Bank (TWB) is to end extreme poverty within a generation and promote the so-called shared responsibility in a sustainable scheme among the more than 145 client countries. The World Bank noted that for that past decades, the progress on reducing poverty was markedly significant. In fact, the world has cut the poverty rate in half in 2015, which was 5 years ahead of targeted schedule in 2010. This was achieved through the Millennium Development Goals. While it is true that the progress in poverty reduction was considered significant, the organization finds that global poverty still remains to be unacceptably high. And while the poverty rate was halved in 2015, the new target to end extreme poverty by 2030, with all the available global growth forecasts, poverty reduction is found to be not fast enough to hit such a target, and the target years is exactly ten (10) years from today. However, we must not lose sight of what we have accomplished so far. Based on the most available data, ten percent (10%) of the population of the world in 2015 was living on a daily amount less than US\$1.90, which is approximately Php100. In 2013, this percentage was eleven percent (11%) – a difference of 1% in just 2 years. And,

way back in 1990, – when 1.85 billion people lived on less than this amount – this was actually thirty-six (36%) percent – a difference of twenty-six (26%) in fifteen (15) years, in 2015 – when the 1.85 billion people decreased to just 736 million to have lived on less than this amount. According to the TWB, we are making progress in poverty reduction.

Regional Poverty Update

Poverty reduction, however, appeared to be uneven and are elaborated in the following respects: [1] The TWB noted that two regions have already reached the 2030 target by reducing extreme poverty. These two regions include the East Asia and Pacific where only 47 million are extremely poor and the Europe and Central Asia where only 7 million are extremely poor – these two regions have reduced poverty to below three percent (3%); [2] The TWB found that higher than half of the number of extremely poor families reside in Sub-Saharan Africa, and this number, to date, even increased by 9 million. Further, 413 million in the Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than US\$1.90 a day, or approximately Php100 a day, compared with all the other regions combined. If this trend would continue, we will expect that in 2030, out of 10 extremely poor families, 9 will have been found in Sub-Saharan Africa; and, [3] Majority of the extremely poor families in the world live in rural areas, they do not have education or have poor education, they are employed in the agricultural sector, and are under 18 years old. Finally, the TWB noted that of the 736 million people living in extreme poverty worldwide, half live in just five (5) countries: Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, and Nigeria.

International Efforts to Combatting Poverty

In Bangladesh, on a positive note, the World Bank observed that it has remarkably made significant progress in reducing its poverty, as the country was able to sustain its economic growth. Using \$1.90 which is approximately Php100 as an internationally considered poverty line, the country had a drop from forty-four (44%) percent in the year 1991 to just fourteen (14%) percent in the years 2016 and 2017.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, on a positive note, the number of people who are living below the poverty line dropped from fifty-one (51%) percent in the year 2005 to forty-one (41%) percent in the year 2011. Surprisingly, however, this poverty rate increased in 2016. The people of Congo and its experts observed that the rise of poverty rate was found in rural areas, and they attributed it to the decline in oil prices.

In Ethiopia, the number of people reached 109 million, making it the second nation in Africa to be the most populous, Nigeria to be the first. On a positive note, Ethiopia had the fastest growth in its economy in the region. On a negative note, it is still one of the poorest countries, with a per capita income of \$790, or approximately Php39,500.

In India, between the years 2011 and 2015, more than ninety (90) million of its population escaped from extreme poverty and that the living standards of its people improved. The people of India attributed this effect to its robust economic growth. On a negative note, the growth rate of India decelerated in the past two years.

In Nigeria, the growth is too low that it is unable to help escape from poverty half of its population. There was progress in some sectors or aspects of living in India, but the creation of employment remains weak to adversely and positively impact its economy. The unemployment rate is high at twenty-three (23%) percent, and twenty (20%) percent of the labor force remains underemployed. The people of Nigeria attributed these effects to the instability in the North region and the displacement of people resulting to a huge incidence of poverty in the North East region.

The United Nations and Global Poverty

Internationally speaking, how far have we accomplished in helping the world to eradicate poverty by 2030? The United Nations, an international peacekeeping organization and a forum for resolving conflicts between nations, established in 1945 to help the world regain from the World War II, also aims to make an effort towards the eradication of poverty and extreme hunger, in fact, it is its Goal 1 through its Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations released a report – the Millennium Development Goals Report 2015 – with the following profound achievements, viz: [1] drop to fourteen percent (14%) in 2015 compared to 1990 of the number of poor people who live on a daily bases with or less than \$1.25 (approximately close to Php100 a day); [2] drop from 1.9 billion in the year 1990 to just 836 million in the year 2015 of the number of poor people living in extreme poverty; [3] tripled number from 1991 to 2015 of the number/proportion of people in the working class who are living on more than \$4 in a day (approximately Php200); and, [4] drop to 12.9% in 2014-2016 from 23.3% in 1990-1992 of the number of proportion of undernourished poor people in the regions considered as developing regions.

Related to the previous findings is the report from The World Development Indicators (2016), that on 2012 thirteen percent (13%) of the population of the world who were living below what is internationally considered as poverty line (\$1.90 daily) dropped as compared to the 1990's data, 37%. While in 2015, the global extreme poverty rate is below ten percent (10%), a two-thirds (2/3) drop since 1990. China and India dominated the reduction of extreme level of poverty in the whole world. In the East Asia and Pacific, and South Asia, poverty was reduced from 61% in 1990.

Poverty in the Philippines

In the Philippines, poverty rate has decreased and the hope to finally eradicate it is high. In his speech transcript posted online at the The World Bank website delivered on May 30, 2018, country director for the Philippines Mara K. Warwick claimed that the country had experienced poverty decline from 26.6 % in 2006 to 21.6 percent in 2015, a difference of 5.0%. She mentioned of a few contributory factors for this difference, namely: [1] expansion of jobs outside agriculture, [2] government transfers, and [3] remittances. In terms of 'government transfers', she emphasized the strategy Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program that grants cash transfers to qualified poor family households. Further, she noted that attendance to schools increased in the recent years adding in her comments the universal and the once controversial and mandatory enrolment in kindergarten and to the two years of senior high school. Furthermore, she noted that the use of health care services has increased which she attributed with the country's pro-poor policies and the changes in health insurance coverage. Moreover, she observed that the Filipinos had access to clean water and sanitation and there was an improvement in electricity as well. Finally, she said that there was an expansion to social safety nets to cover the poor households of the country. With this, she reasoned that the Philippines could overcome poverty.

What else could the Philippines do to address poverty?

However, on a negative note, Director Warwick shared some points as well that the Philippines still needs to address to combat poverty. She opened that in 2015, despite the progress in poverty reduction in the country, there were still twenty-two (22) million Filipino households who are poor. These poor families were mostly living in rural areas where access to quality schools is limited, as well as low access to health centers, and sources for safe drinking water. Aside from these, the inaccessibility to roads and transportation to help them travel to their jobs or bring their merchandise to market is also a reason. Adding to these dilemmas is the fact that some poor families live

in locations that are marked by armed conflict and are prone to natural disasters. She reasoned that the occurrence of conflict in an area forces poor families to change residence and that disasters can further aggravate the situations of families who are struggling to move up the poverty line.

Finally, Director Warwick highlighted a few particular points which to her could help the Philippines eradicate poverty: [1] create more and better jobs, [2] unlock potential of Mindanao, since 2 of 5 poor reside in Mindanao, [3] focus on maternal health and health interventions on the first 1000 days of life, and [4] create opportunities for children to learn and attend school. According to her, many of these policy recommendations are already incorporated in the AmBisyon 2040 and the Philippine Development Plan 2017 – 2022.

Poverty in the Philippines and AmBisyon 2040

The AmBisyon 2040 is a term coined to refer to the aspirations of each Filipino people for himself or herself and for the Philippines to have by the year 2040. It consists of a set of goals in life for every Filipino and for the Philippines in the next 20 years, to reach 2040, i.e. By the year 2040, each Filipino is envisioned to enjoy a strongly rooted, comfortable, and secure life. By the year 2040, poverty therefore is already eradicated, and no one is poor and that Filipinos live healthy lives, they are smart, and are innovative - based on this ambition. Using the Filipino language, AmBisyon 2040 wants each Filipino to be 'Matatag, Maginhawa at Panatag.' We are exactly twenty (20) years away from this dream.

The Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022, or PDP, is a medium-term plan, anchored from AmBisyon 2040, obviously with its end results to target completion by 2022, which is two (2) years away from today. The three major strategic outcomes of the PDP include three pillars, namely, *malasakit*, *pagbabago*, and *patuloy na pag-unlad*. The PDP document is organized into seven (7) parts/divisions. Generally, the PDP document a sure manifestation of the country's serious goals towards its goals, including its quest and strategies for poverty reduction.

One of the most successful poverty reduction strategies conducted in the country through the Department of Social Welfare and Development, or DSWD, was the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, or 4Ps. The 4Ps is actually a mechanism patterned from other countries in Latin America because of its success in reducing poverty. Basically, the scheme is to give cash to qualified poor families in the Philippines in the form of cash grant and education grant after all conditions are met.

Research in Poverty

Various studies have already been conducted as to the effectiveness of this poverty reduction strategy including its impact through studies conducted jointly by the DSWD and the World Bank that result to the Impact Evaluation Report 2012 and 2014, not to mention national and regional studies conducted from 2015 to 2019 establishing in general the success of the program to eliminate poverty in the country.

However, in 2018, Department of Agriculture Secretary Piñol took to national television his negative take on the program, as ever since he is not positive on the program. He claimed that the 4Ps household beneficiaries are not working anymore and they just wait for the release of the cash grant and that the field of agriculture has lost much of its labor force. Further, he recommended that the P70 billion 4Ps funds approved by Congress be diverted to livelihood programs, instead. Secretary Piñol did not directly say that the 4Ps program be totally abolished, but that the funds be redirected for livelihood. This claim or national observation by a department secretary presents a gap between what studies have thus far revealed to what actually is happening and is being observed at a national level. It could be remembered that the Department of Social

Welfare and Development through the then Acting Secretary Orogo in 2018, when Secretary Piñol blamed the 4Ps for low employment in agriculture sector, denied these allegations.

Further, in a study conducted among the first wave of 4Ps beneficiaries from November to December 2011 – almost three years since the implementation of 4Ps, entitled 'Does Pantawid Foster Dependence or Encourage Work? Evidence from a Randomized Experiment,' the researcher, Dr. Aniceto Orbeta, PIDS senior research fellow, claimed that conditional cash transfers (CCT) actually increased the willingness of household head to work and his female spouse, including all adult members who are 18 years old and above, and even the middle-aged workers who are aged 35-54 years old, had desire to work as well. This was directly opposite to the claim of detractors that CCT breeds mendicancy. This effect or scenario or, confusion, on 4Ps is just one of the few or many possible effects not yet known or known but is not yet fully established.

In the study of Reyes & Valencia (2004), Senior Research Fellow of the Philippine Institute of Development Studies and Research Associate, respectively, entitled "Poverty Reduction Strategy and Poverty Monitoring: Philippine Case Study", wrote conclusions that led to the following realizations: [1] The goal to improve the way of living of the Filipino particularly the poor would still require much things to be done; [2] Good poverty monitoring systems are necessary to accompany any plans for poverty reduction; and, [3] Essential information are provided to national and local governments to guide them in poverty reduction plans, strategies and policies through existing poverty monitoring systems in the Philippines.

Further, they noted that there are weaknesses such as [a] the frequency when data are collected and [b] the levels of disaggregation, or how the data are separated into components. According to them (Reyes & Valencia, 2004), to resolve issues in the gaps in the data, monitoring system at the community level has been the initiative. Through this initiative, the local government units are capacitated to diagnose localized poverty, i.e. the status of poverty in their own respective localities. This initiative as well is favorable to the national government since the national statistics offices cannot automatically provide for all requirements to gather data given limited resources and time. Finally, the information could help each barangay of such a locality to locally act on its issues like poverty, among others.

Local Efforts to Poverty Reduction

This conclusion reached by researchers Reyes and Valencia is a strong realization to push through for a poverty monitoring in the Province of Pangasinan particularly on the status and implementation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, or 4Ps, to guide the Sangguniang Bayan and other stakeholders in its policy formulations.

The province of Pangasinan has been doing its best to respond to the challenge, and as a proof, it was awarded the Best Province on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Project Implementer, 2010; and Best Province on Poverty Reduction Program Implementer 2010 given by the Regional Development Council-NEDA R1. It was during this time that the province displayed exemplary accomplishments in the area of poverty reduction and other development thrusts. From 2006-2012 as reported in the official website of Pangasinan, the province has reached the sharpest decline of poverty incidence (9.5%) in Region 1 due to the continuous implementation of the different results-oriented poverty reduction programs, projects and activities.

In 2015, Pangasinan joined the Poverty Alleviation Advocacy, "I CARE Commitment" spearheaded by the Catholic church as it celebrates the Year of the Poor 2014-2015. The advocacy centers on reaching out to the poor and the needy which is aligned to the poverty alleviation efforts and employment generation of Governor Espino.

The creation of the Local Anti-Poverty Council in the Municipality of Lingayen under Ordinance no. 48, s. – 2017 is another manifestation that the province is committed to keep track of the poverty situations in the local area. Moreover, in 2014 Pangasinan entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Social Welfare and Development to avail of a copy of the results of the survey on National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction which was used in the poverty reduction program planning in the province. There is also the continuous monitoring of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) as one of the mechanisms adopted to reduce poverty, with the initial beneficiaries of 12,055 in 2009 as compared to the 2012 beneficiaries of 184,495 due to the expansion of coverage of the program and increasing population. Our most recent statistics on the Philippines 4Ps' Implementation Report appears in the Executive Summary of the DSWD in their website states that, as of 31 December 2019, the 4Ps is being implemented in 144 cities, 1, 483 municipalities in 80 provinces, with a total of 5, 066, 92 registered households. Further, they stated that out of the total number of registered households, 4, 250, 272 are active households or 96.60% of this year's target of 4, 400, 000 households.

Poverty reduction is clearly happening in the country. However, much work is to be done to monitor its implementation to benefit the future generation.

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