

Child Poverty and Social Protection in the Philippines

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Abstract:

In societies where poverty is a day to day struggle, children suffer the most as they comprise the most vulnerable group in any population. In the Philippines where poverty affects millions of families, it is not surprising to see children who wander the streets of slum areas, suffer from poor nutrition, and are uneducated. The problem goes beyond mere lack of income or assets. Their situation speaks of a roster of factors that range from lack of appropriate skills to inability to control fertility intertwined with lack of job opportunities and other economic problems. To help address this, the creation of knowledge related to the situation of children in impoverished conditions is critical.

To date, the most comprehensive profile of children in poverty in the country was that in the Philippine Report of the UNICEF's Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities. From that study, it was found that there are about 29.4 million Filipino children aged 14 and below who were living below the poverty line (PIDS-UNICEF, 2010) in 2006. The trend has been increasing; and the condition varies across sub-national regions of the country. Meanwhile, about 6.6 million children suffer from at least one form of deprivation. This paper serves as an update to this undertaking. In particular, it aims to comprehensively profile the Filipino children who are suffering from various dimensions of poverty using updated survey data. The state of deprivation in terms of health, education, income, shelter, sanitation, basic amenities, and information will be mapped out. The profiling will provide disaggregated information by age, family size, household type, parent's educational attainment, and sub-national regions. To provide a better visual presentation of the information, child poverty data will be mapped using Geographic Information Systems. Policy-makers are able to appreciate the spatial aspects of certain social and economic issues with the use of maps.

A significant addition to this report is an analysis of the dynamics of child poverty using panel data from the 2003, 2006, and 2009 rounds of the Philippines' Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES). Because the poor is not a homogenous group and poverty is a complex issue, there is a need to understand the dynamics of poverty involving children and their families. The paper will look into children's movement in and out of poverty and the factors that contribute to these changes. There is limited body of literature when it comes to this kind of analysis due to the rarity of nationally-representative longitudinal data. This paper will help us understand not just the children's situation in a given time, but also the changes over time. Using this, social protection programs and other interventions can be better formulated.

Aside from analyzing child poverty, this paper intends to form a more complete picture by also assessing a social development program that have a huge potential impact on this issue. In 2008, the Philippine government launched one of its biggest social protection programs - the *Pantamid Pamilya Pilipino* Program (4Ps), the country's conditional cash transfer program. This paper will examine how the 4Ps has affected the well-being of children. Since the core of the 4Ps is to break intergenerational poverty through investment in human capital, an



assessment of how it has impacted children so far is very important. The program which commenced in 2008 is about to let its first set of beneficiaries graduate from the program this year, 2013. Has it contributed in bringing more children to school? If so, by how many points? Is there any differentiated impact in terms of age and sex? This paper attempts to answer these research questions. The objective is to identify effective aspects for possible replication in similar programs of the Philippine government and to identify components and approaches that need fine-tuning to ensure that the program will achieve its long-term objectives. The study found that children in poverty continue to rise despite the country's recent gains in economic growth. Applying the new poverty methodology, the proportion of poor children increased from 34.1 percent in 2003 to 36.5 in 2009. This translates to an increase of over half a million poor children aged 14 and below. This owes to the fact that population continues to grow rapidly. From 2000 to 2010, population grew by 1.9 percent per year. The rise in poverty also indicates that economic advancement has not been inclusive enough to reduce poverty.

The recent rise in poverty incidence has been also validated by non-income measures. Children deprived of decent shelter and those who are malnourished are on the rise. Worse, there are more children now who suffer from multiple types of deprivation than before. There are wide disparities across sub-national regions in terms of both number and proportion, therefore looking beyond the national figure will provide a more meaningful and helpful way to tackle the issues.

Meanwhile, the CCT has led to a greater proportion of children attending school for those within its target age range – children who are 6 to 14 years old, but not for older children, or those aged 15 and above. On the contrary, since schooling has a far greater opportunity costs for older children, then there is a need to take this into account in government programs to ensure they continue schooling beyond elementary level. It is therefore recommended that the program assistance be deepened such that older poor children beneficiaries can finish at least high school so they can have better access to decent jobs and ultimately break intergenerational poverty.

