

Comprehensive Analysis of the Poverty Situation in the Philippines: Basis for a Sustainable Local Poverty Reduction Program Model¹

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is a social concern dealt by various national, international organizations, and Local Government Units in search of workable solutions. Yet, it remains to be an unsolved issue; hence, a comprehensive analysis of the poverty situation in the Central Philippines was conducted. The study was conducted in the MIMAROPA Region which is a cluster of island provinces in Southern Tagalog that consistently belongs to the club of 40 poorest provinces in the Philippines. Ten poor municipalities, two from each province, were studied in order to analyze the poverty situation in the region. Combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was employed and key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used in gathering data that were subsequently complemented with various service statistics of the five provinces. Results show that the poor municipalities in these provinces were facing almost common issues that directly affect the poverty situation in the region. Causes and immediate effects were interrelated. The unresolved poverty situation in the locality may be attributed to the weak political will of the LGU in implementing a sustainable poverty reduction program, piecemeal programs of various sectors, and none compliance with the public consultation required to package the SLPRP. Likewise, the top down approach of management was not advantageous. Thus, a convergence web approach was proposed in developing a Sustainable Local Poverty Reduction Program model to address the identified problems. The project gave birth to the In Vitro- In Vivo Development frameworks which is the novelty of the study.

Key words: *Convergence Web Approach, Community In Vitro and In Vivo Development Framework, SLRP Model, MIMAROPA Region*

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty is defined as a state of want in relation to a social standard and is usually associated with lack of income (Balisacan, 2001). In the Philippines, poverty and inequality are recurrent issues worsened by global financial crisis resulting in food and fuel shortage and commodity price hike. It is aggravated by the prevalent graft and corruption, patronage politics and the dole out mentality among poor communities that has worsened through the years. Poverty in the country exists in various faces: lack of employment opportunities, lack of funds for livelihood projects, the increasing number of out-of-school youths, frequency of theft, and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

The main causes of poverty in the country were explained in the 2009 study of the Asian Development Bank. Among these were low to moderate economic growth; low growth elasticity of poverty reduction; weakness in employment generation and the quality of jobs generated; failure to fully develop the agricultural sector; high inflation during crisis periods; high levels of population growth; high and persistent levels of inequality and recurrent shocks and exposure to risks, such as: economic crises, conflicts, natural disasters and environmental poverty. These causes were already apparent in an investigation conducted by Balisacan in 2001. Results of that study pointed to the following as the possible causes of poverty in the Philippines: inability to obtain adequate return from one's labor services; inequality of the distribution of wealth and access to resources; low labor productivity; unresponsiveness of government to the needs of the poor that are often reinforced by people's low expectations; the complexity of the processes that make poverty self-reproducing as the poor unwittingly participate in their immiserization (manipulation by vested interest).

A study conducted by Lam attempting to describe who the poor are, revealed that the poor live in rural areas (70%, 2000); have no adequate access to housing; derive income mainly from entrepreneurial activities (35.3%, 1998) such as retail trade, construction and transport sectors; are less educated and more malnourished than non-poor due to inadequate access to public service, including clean water, electricity, education, health and sanitation services; are more economically active than the rest of the population with a higher labor participation rate; and coming from bigger families than average ones.

In the island cluster of MIMAROPA, the acronym for Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan, poverty is of utmost concern since these island provinces belong to the club of 40 poorest provinces in the

Philippines. Poverty incidence is highly denoted by their relative rankings: Oriental Mindoro, 8th; Palawan, 12th; Occidental Mindoro, 13th; Romblon, 20th; and Marinduque, 27th (NCSB, 2005).

For decades, addressing poverty has been the flagship program of the government through its various agencies particularly the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Agriculture (DA). In fact, the Philippine government is in full support of the millennium development goals of the United Nations Organization, and one of which is to eradicate extreme poverty by 2015 (UNDP, 2008). However, the last four administrations had launched noteworthy government programs on poverty reduction: Aquino spearheaded the "Tulong sa Tao Program", Ramos was for the banner program "Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDDS)", Estrada focused on "Lingap sa Mahirap Program", and Arroyo for "Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan (KALAH!) literally translated as "Linking Arms Against Poverty". During the third year of Arroyo's administration, the government positioned the 4P's which is the Condition Cash Transfer (CCT) program aimed at addressing poverty and supporting improved health and education outcomes of poor children and pregnant women.

Unfortunately, poverty remains a major issue of concern in the country despite these initiatives. Contrary to reports of economic growth, poverty alleviation programs have had still limited impact on poverty reduction in the country. For the past four decades, the number of households living below the poverty line has declined very slowly and unevenly, much slower than other neighboring countries in Asia (NEDA). Poverty is indeed a serious issue and something must be done about it; however, interventions cannot just start from nowhere but from the grassroots. Essential in coming up with a relevant and responsive poverty alleviation program is the conduct of a comprehensive study and analysis of the poverty situation in a certain locality to ensure that the development programs to be launched are congruent to the needs of the people and the community, hence this study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methods Used

The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of research to comprehensively analyze the poverty situation in selected municipalities in the region. The different components of the problem were described based on the data gathering experiences that

happened in the first municipality, in which a model, anchored on a TQM-based framework grounded in the PDSA cycle was developed in order to come up with valid and reliable data. This was named *Community In Vitro and In Vivo Development Framework*.

Getting into an 'unfamiliar' territory required intensive planning and plans of which were translated into doable intents and were studied in terms of their workability. Deficiencies were acted upon and planning was improved the second time the researchers conducted the surveys and interviews in the next municipality. The cycle was employed from one town to another with Key Informant Interviews (KII) yielding genuine data (in vitro), while Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) resulting to data that were already adulterated since data generation was influenced by the focus group members; hence in vivo.

Instrumentation

Guide Questions for KIIs and FGDs. There were eight questions asked both in KIIs and FGDs. These items were designed to generate responses as to the major issues in the community that have direct impact on the poverty situation; how widespread the problem was; their causes and effects; solutions; programs addressing the problems; needed assistance.

Samples

Respondents were selected in multi-stages. The first stage was the identification of two poorest municipalities in every province based on their socio-economic profiles released by NEDA and Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF) which resulted in the inclusion of the following: Bulalacao and Mansalay in Oriental Mindoro; Calintaan and Rizal in Occidental Mindoro; Aborlan and Española in Palawan; Buenavista and Mogpog in Marinduque; and Corcuera and Santa Maria in Romblon.

The second stage was the identification of key informants and focus groups. In each of the 10 identified towns representing the five MIMAROPA provinces, 11 KIIs (a total of 110) and three FGDs (a total of 30) were conducted. Informants and focus group participants were purposively selected. For KIIs, the following were chosen per municipality: 1 Municipal mayor/vice mayor; 1 Municipal Planning &



Figure 1. Map of the MIMAROPA Region

Development Coordinator (MPDC); 1 Religious Leader; 1 Barangay/Municipal Councilor; 2 NGO Board Chairmen/BOT Member; 2 Barangay Captains; 1 respected informal leader in the community; and 2 appointed Barangay LGU (BNS/BHW).

Participants of the FGDs were selected from among these groups: one (1) FGD with the Vice Mayor and the Sangguniang Bayan members; Two FGDs with any of the Local Government Units, Teachers from DepEd, youth and students, non-government organizations, socio-civic or religious organization. Aside from the two depressed municipalities in every province, several marginalized groups were highlighted in this research project: the Rebel Returnees of Oriental Mindoro; the Indigenous People of Occidental Mindoro; the Inmates in the Penal Colony in Iwahig, Puerto Princesa; the Cooperative Groups of Marinduque; and the Women’s Association of Romblon.

Data Collection Methods

1. *Key Informant Interview (KII).* Using the questionnaire, the survey team members individually got the information needed from the pre-selected key informants who held key information about the topic/issues covered in the interview guide.
2. *Focus Group Discussion (FGD.)* This was the method used in gathering or validating first-hand information data through a small group discussion focused on specific key questions.

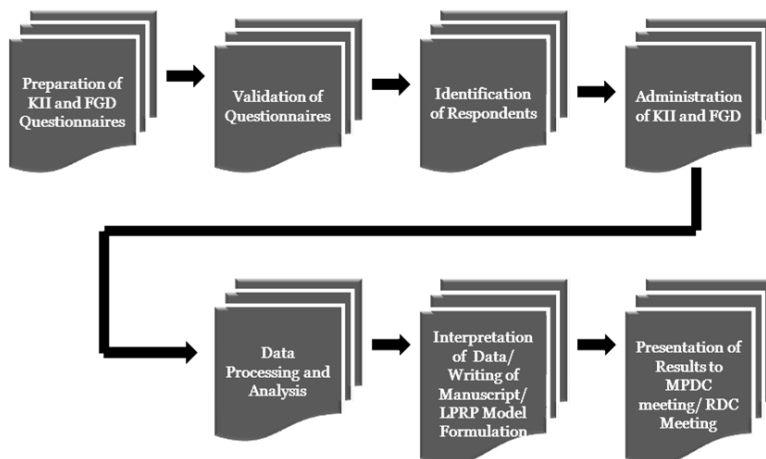


Figure 2. Process Flow of the Study

3. *Collection of Secondary Data.* The researchers secured copies of the socio-economic profile of the selected municipalities, Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP), Five-Year Development Plan, Executive Legislative Agenda, Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS), Provincial Annual Report, Provincial Poverty Map and the like.
4. The researchers established linkages with the State Colleges and Universities Administration and staff in MIMAROPA for the necessary assistance in the implementation of the project.

RESULTS

Major Issues with Direct Impact on Poverty

Table 1. Summary of poverty related problems among depressed municipalities in the MIMAROPA Region

POVERTY RELATED PROBLEMS	ROMBLON		MARINDUQUE		PALAWAN		OCC. MINDORO		OR. MINDORO		TOTAL SCORE
	Sta. Maria	Corcuera	Buenavista	Mogpog	Aborlan	Espanola	Calintaan	Rizal	Bulalacao	Mansalay	
1 Unemployment/Lack of Job Opportunity	3	1	2	3			3	2	1		15
2 Culture/Attitude of the People/Leaders		2	3	2	3	1	1		3		15
3 No Access to Potable Water						3				2	5
4 Poor Road Networks/ Infrastructures						2	3				5
5 Insufficient Water Supply/Irrigation	1	3					1				5
6 Patronage Politics/ Weak Political Will				1	2		2				5
7 Health/Sanitation/ Malnutrition	2		1								3
8 Insurgency									2	1	3
9 Environmental Destruction										3	3
10 Inequitable Land Distribution					2						2

SCORING: 3 – Top problem

2 – Second problem

1-Third problem

Table 2. Major issues with direct impact on poverty

RANK	POVERTY INDICATORS
1	Unemployment/Lack of job opportunity
2	Culture/Attitude of the people/leaders
3	No access to potable water
4	Poor road network
5	Insufficient water supply (Irrigation)
6	Patronage Politics/ Weak Political Will
7	Health and Sanitation/Malnutrition
8	Insurgency
9	Environmental Destruction
10	Inequitable Land Distribution

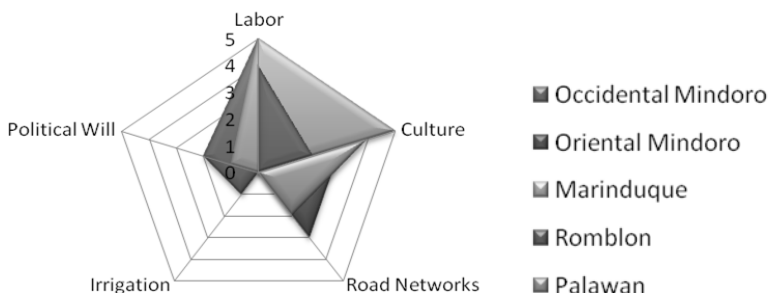


Figure 3. A radar map summarizing the poverty related problems among depressed municipalities in the MIMAROPA Region

Five major issues were identified in the radar map. Labor problems like unemployment and lack of employment opportunities were major issues in Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro, and Romblon. Cultural issues like people’s passive attitudes and ‘culture of silence’ were problems in Marinduque, Palawan, Oriental Mindoro and Romblon while road networks in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan. Politics were issues of concern in Occidental Mindoro and Marinduque while irrigation was of concern in Occidental Mindoro.

2. Causes and Effects of the issues with direct impact to poverty situation

Results of the study revealed that poverty levels are strongly associated with educational attainment. Low educational attainment resulted to unemployment. It was also confirmed that usually poor families have five or more members. Responsible parenting is critical for an effective poverty reduction program. In the focus group discussions with non-government organization and socio-civic groups, it was pointed out that there are governance and institutional constraints. Many government

leaders have poor political will to implement local reforms. Respondents said that local government capacity for implementing poverty programs is weak. Revealed also were the serious resource gaps for effective basic services delivery.

3. Current programs of various institutions in the locality

The Local Government Units have several poverty reduction programs downloaded by the national agencies but all these registered a very negligible impact. The DSWD as the key implementer of the poverty reduction programs of the government became a dole out agency. The DTI, DOLE and TESDA are some of the agencies mentioned that participate and offer trainings for livelihood programs, but again each of these local agencies packaged their own programs distinct from each other. Respondents attributed these results to the poor political will of the leaders, patronage politics, and cultural values and attitude of the recipients. The initiative and active participation of non-government organizations in the whole region is commendable. The Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF) together with the Partner Access Center (PAC) in each province (AROPAD in Romblon, ORNET in Mindoro, PNNI in Palawan) have successfully delivered major poverty reduction projects. These NGO's focused more on basic services like water and health facilities. The social action groups, mostly with religious affiliation are also mobile and visible but their funds and services are limited. In some parts of the region like Marinduque and Romblon, the cooperatives are well-organized and have established partners of the government that address poverty through micro financing and various livelihood programs. The study also revealed the vast natural resources unique in every province and municipality.

4. Resources and capabilities available

The five provinces are gifted with rich natural resources; from marine to forest, minerals and agricultural lands, vast ecotourism potential, and human resources. However, a large percentage of these resources are endangered if not devastated. The marine ecosystem is disturbed, the potential ecotourism is underdeveloped and the human resources end to migration resulting to brain drain.

5. Areas for State Universities and Colleges (SUC) Intervention

The study identified potential entry points for research and extension programs for SUCs. The unique picture of each province needs a particular intervention program such as:

1. Mindoro Oriental has the Rebel Returnee group who is in need of a holistic package of development program so that members can live a normal life and be productive citizens.
2. Mindoro Occidental has the Indigenous People (IP) with unique culture that has to be addressed and transformed for them to be key players of community development.
3. Marinduque is the home of progressive sectoral cooperatives that contribute in terms of values and social responsibility. The issue of environmental degradation is still a dilemma to the Marinduqueños.
4. Romblon has the empowered women's group aside from established cooperatives who contribute much in the economic and cultural development of the province. These groups need support to sustain their local economic development programs.
5. Palawan is the home of the inmates in the Iwahig Penal Colony. Thousands of them unceasingly pray that someday someone could help review their cases and work for their pardon and be given a chance to live a normal life outside the prison cell.

Findings and Discussions

The study revealed that the major constraint in the attempts to alleviate poverty in the Southern Tagalog island provinces is deeply rooted on the culture and value system of the beneficiaries, program implementer, and the will of political leaders. The poverty alleviation programs initiated by the national government are top down packaged programs that exclude sense of ownership on the part of the recipients. Consequently, it develops "dole-out mentality" and passive attitude towards sustainability of the program. Results further revealed that there is a gap between the program and the actual need of the local community because the social preparation, an important aspect had been missed out.

In recent past, several poverty alleviation programs sponsored by various agencies were disintegrated. Respondents also revealed that these programs were politically attached and discontinued after each term of office.

Respondents further agreed that the ten poverty indicators were offshoots of the three major constraints mentioned above. Research

revealed that the poorest of the poor including inmates in the penal colony, rebel returnees and indigenous people need urgent attention to alleviate them from inadequate condition. The study identified that the existing poverty reduction top-to-bottom programs are not suited to address their needs. Thus, the bottoms-up approach is designed as strategy to truly address the poverty alleviation program issues. The SLPRP is a customized model to ensure maximum results.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the data revealed the following:

1. Majority of the poor in the Region belong to the agricultural sectors in rural areas primarily farmers and fisherfolks, and the marginalized sector;
2. Poverty levels are strongly related to the low educational attainment of the people;
3. The poor have large families with 5 or more dependents;
4. Poor governance and weak political will of elected leaders were identified to be the institutional constraints towards success in poverty alleviation program;
5. Deficient poverty programs are anchored on unreliable and inaccurate poverty information that mismatched with poverty program designs and implementation;
6. Serious resource gaps for poverty reduction activities are prevalent in almost all areas in Region IV-B ; and
7. A multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral approach to poverty reduction is urgently needed to escape poverty traps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government should improve its strategy in addressing poverty issues. Poverty problem is multidimensional hence the response should involve multiple sectors, agencies, institutions and stakeholders. The convergence approach is recommended to be scaled up and practiced extensively. This is spelled out in the SLPRP Model diagram. It is further recommended:

1. that values reorientation be the core of the packaged SLPRP model;
2. that efficiencies and capacities be improved among institutions tasked to coordinate poverty policies and implement poverty programs;
3. that cooperating institutions help reduce graft and corruption within their ranks;

4. to consider the unique picture of each province, region and its local characteristics in designing poverty program interventions;
5. to involve the marginalized groups and the stakeholders in the planning and designing of poverty programs through public hearing, assembly meeting or consultation forum;
6. to encourage non-government organizations and key stakeholders to complement the government poverty programs in specific localities and communities from planning to implementation, then to monitoring and evaluation;
7. to define the specific roles of agencies and key stakeholders at various levels of intervention into a new poverty framework to have a unified action; and
8. to formulate a management plan with corresponding organizational diagram depicting the flow of communication and coordination among and between agencies and key stakeholders.

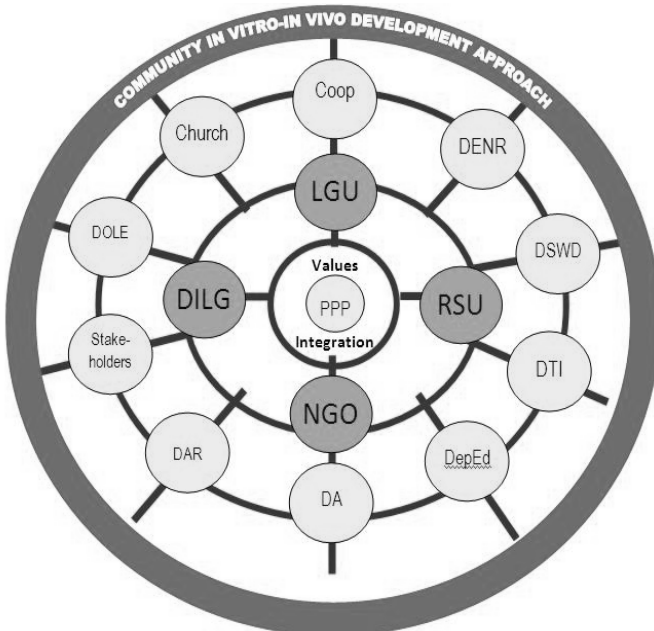


Figure 4. The SLPRP Model

The Sustainable Livelihood Poverty Reduction model explains that every government and non-government agency has a poverty related program. Each program has a distinct approach but the goal is focused on the government’s Medium Term Development Plan on poverty alleviation. However, the piecemeal approach in program implementation lessens its impact on the socio-economic conditions of the beneficiaries. Only when resources of different GOs, NGOs and stakeholders are pooled together and

their services properly bundled in a common but differentiated responsibilities shall poverty alleviation programs become more sustainable. For example, DOLE trains the manpower resource, DOST provides funding and DTI markets the technology.

Central to the model are the core agencies that must converge first before reaching out to other stakeholders. LGU controls a lot of human and financial resources, however the agency is known for a political inkling. In this case DILG becomes the arbiter of political motives in any poverty program. NGOs on the other hand have some misgivings on LGU's participation in poverty related projects, thus, RSU, a state university comes into the picture as a neutralizer and convenor to put all efforts together to a common vision and goal. For the purpose of the model above, the following acronyms have been defined:

Acronyms:

PPP – Public-Private Partnership	DepEd – Department of Education
LGU – Local Government Unit	DTI – Department of Trade and Industry
RSU – Romblon State University	DSWD – Department of Social Welfare and Development
DILG – Department of Interior of Local Government	DENR – Department of Environment and Natural Resources
DOLE – Department of Labor and Employment	DA – Department of Agriculture
DAR – Department of Agrarian Reform	

Hi-Five Rules in the SLPRP Model Formulation

1. Conduct thorough environmental scanning and public consultation;
2. Proceed with a participative road mapping to design the SLPRP model;
3. Presentation of SLPRP model for consensus building to engage sectoral participation; and
4. Implementation of the SLPRP model using Public Private Partnership.
5. Establish a healthy feedback mechanism through regular monitoring and evaluation

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