

Philippine Social Development Perspectives: Do People Really Matter?

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Social development, in its broadest sense, is human development. Social development policies have been articulated by the government in several national programs — the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan, Social Reform Agenda, and Human Development Report. However, these programs still fall short of addressing the real concerns of human development. Among the issues that remain to be resolved are, among others: allocation of funds to social development programs; reliable and valid source of information and data regarding the target clientele; and realistic indicators of empowerment.

The operational meaning and concept of social development has considerably changed over the past decades after Blumer's (1966) attempt to define it and MacPherson's (1989) effort to explain its scope and limitation. In 1988, the United Nations Center for Regional Development (UNCRD) described social development in terms of its prescribed goals of "equity, social justice, cultural promotion and peace of mind" and enhancement of people's capacity to develop their own potential. Thus, it is not simply concerned with the improvement of people's access to health, education, and welfare services. It is posited that the achievement of these goals will bring about social development.

The issues of equity and social justice are reiterated in the UN's Second Development Decade, where it views equitable distribution of income and wealth, income security, and guaranteed employment as essential in the promotion of social justice and realization of the "ultimate purpose of development."¹ It does not, however, underrate economic growth but instead declares that sustained economic growth must "go hand-in-hand" with "qualitative and structural changes in the society" whereby structural disparities, whether regional, sectoral, and social, must be substantially reduced.

In other words, UN believes that a growing economy must be able to reduce if not eliminate poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The cliché "redistribution from growth" is best expressed by Todaro's (1994: 16) definition of development:

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Development must therefore be conceived of as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the *acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty.* (Italics provided.)

Furthermore, Todaro explains:

Development ... must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually 'better' (1994: 16).

Development therefore is human development where people are both actors and beneficiaries of the fruits of society's development. Thus, social development as distinguished from economic development is concerned with fewer material or non-material aspects and "less economic factors which contribute to the overall quality of human life" (UNCRD 1988). If economic development is measured through the rate of increase in society's gross national product (GNP), gross domestic product (GDP), and income per capita (IPC) or per capita GNP, non-economic social indicators like gains in literacy, schooling, health conditions and welfare services, and provision of housing for instance, are utilized to determine the extent and depth of social improvement.

Nonetheless, social development cannot be severed from the economic, political, cultural, ecological and spiritual environment in which it takes place. As a concept, it is intricately linked with the ideals of peace, freedom, stability and security. Its promotion requires an orientation of values, objectives and priorities towards the well-being of the people as well as the strengthening of institutions and policies attendant to the advancement of people's welfare. Thus, the ultimate goal of social development is to improve and enhance the "quality" of life of all people. Given this context, social development is human development.

Operationally, social or human development is the attainment of people's most basic needs and well-being in terms of longer and more meaningful lives such as being well-nourished and free from avoidable diseases, being well-sheltered and clothed, being economically and physically secure, literate, and empowered to deal with their social circumstances (RP 1995b: 7)

The Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (1993-1998)

Achieving the goal of human development requires the reduction if not the ultimate eradication of absolute poverty in the Philippines. Income inequality, unemployment and underemployment, rising prices, and high population growth continue to contribute to and aggravate the poverty situation. This explains the low standards of living of most Filipinos especially in the countryside. This

problem is compounded by inadequate education, health services, nutrition, housing, and other social and economic facilities.

Apparently, the extirpation of poverty demands access to economic opportunities that will promote sustainable livelihood, basic social services to ensure life sustenance and protection, as well as special efforts to facilitate access to opportunities and services for the disadvantaged. People living in poverty and vulnerable groups must be empowered through organization and participation in all aspects of political, economic, and social life. Notably, the picture of impoverishment of the majority of the Filipinos has not changed for several decades despite efforts of different regimes and governments to alter it.

In the attempt to conclusively resolve the aforecited problem, the government frames its vision of social development in what is known as Philippines 2000. The vision is based on a strong and positive buildup in social capital² or the structure of relations between civil society and government. It is envisaged that by the year 2000, the country would have addressed its internal problems and installed the structural reforms necessary for sustained growth and development.

The strategy of Philippines 2000 is articulated in the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) for 1993-1998. The vision's strategic goal is total human development. It refers not only to development in the economic sphere but includes all aspects, phases, and dimensions of life. It is the process of enabling people to have wider choices and expanding their capabilities that allow them to live full lives as human beings.³

The Plan consists of efforts not only to increase the level and broaden the scope of, and sustain the growth in incomes but also increase the delivery of non-income components of human development and entitlements such as basic education, primary health care, and other social services. The provision of these services or making them affordable to people is expected to improve their lot, thus enabling them to participate in the mainstream of the economy. It also includes measures that will reduce social inequities across regions and equalize basic human opportunities and capabilities.

The Philippines' MTPDP 1993-1998 therefore aims to propel and sustain economic development not only through the promotion of efficiency in the marketplace, but more importantly, through social equity. As a force of development, the Plan's strategy is to invest in people as a means to achieve higher growth in incomes by improving levels of education, health, nutrition, housing, and other services. The efforts to improve human resources for purposes of growth thus address direct human needs.

The human development goals of the Plan are as follows:

- (1) Enable the majority of the population to meet their minimum basic needs, especially raising incomes above the poverty threshold;
- (2) Provide focused basic services to the more disadvantaged sectors at a level which shall allow them to manage and control their resources as well as benefit from developmental interventions; and
- (3) Harness the productive capacity of the country's human resource base for international competitiveness.

Translating these goals into targets, the Plan expects to achieve by the year 1998, among others the following: (1) reduction of poverty incidence to 30% from 39.2% in 1991; (2) generation of employment at 1.1 million jobs per year from 1994 to 1998 thereby reducing the rate of unemployment to 6.6% from 9.1% in 1994; (3) increasing life expectancy to 69.7 years from 68.3 years in 1994; (4) reduction of population growth rate from 2.21% in 1994 to 1.92%; (5) increasing per capita energy intake to 1,977 kilocalories from 1,892 in 1994; (6) improving the literacy rate from 93.5% in 1994 to 96.5%; (7) providing shelter to 316,756 more households or a cumulative total of 1.12 million households with shelter, representing 36.23% of total housing needs for the Plan period; and (8) increasing the proportion of ultra-poor families provided with basic welfare services to 89% from 61% in 1994.

The Human Development Chapter of the MTPDP explicitly espouses the policy of directing public resources and efforts to basic services, disadvantaged regions and specific groups of the poor. This covers the areas of health, nutrition and family planning; education; social welfare; and housing. Corollarily, the Programme of Action on Social Development (1 February 1995) submitted by the government at the recently concluded World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) held in Copenhagen, Denmark, enunciates and commits itself to the following salient measures:

- (1) Giving high priority to social development in the allocation of public spending;
- (2) Implementing the 20/20 formula, wherein 20% of ODA (Official Development Assistance) shall be devoted to priority basic social services and 20% of the national budget be channeled to social development programs;⁴ and
- (3) Achieving the accepted UN target of 0.7% of the Gross National Product (GNP) for ODA, with a larger share for social development.

Other commitments include the reduction of military and arms expenditure in order to increase the allocation of resources for social development; the establishment of an International Fund for Social Development dedicated towards financing activities undertaken by both government and voluntary sector; increasing cooperation among UN, multilateral, bilateral and other donors to synchronize development assistance and acknowledge new forms of aid; and devising debt-reduction schemes for low, lower-middle, and middle income countries.

The Social Reform Agenda

The Social Reform Agenda (SRA) is the commitment of the Ramos Administration to human development. It is a unified operational framework that defines the approaches and strategies to address the problem of poverty which afflicts 27.6 million or 39.2% of the total population. It packages government's interventions designed to meet basic human needs, advance social equity, and promote effective participation of the people, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged sectors of the populace, in the country's economic and political life. These are summed up in its three-point agenda:

- (1) Access to quality basic services or the *imperatives of survival*;
- (2) Asset reform and sustainable development of productive resources and access to economic opportunities or *the means to work and earn a living*; and
- (3) Institution building and participation in governance or *self-governance*.

The SRA contains 68 commitments and provides more specific prescriptions to all social sector agencies and organizations as it stresses the need to service the basic sectors and selected depressed areas. The identification of the targets^b in the nineteen (19) poorest provinces allowed for the clustering of existing and prospective activities under what is referred to as "Flagship Programs." These programs are the Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services; Workers' Welfare and Protection; Socialized Housing; Credit; Livelihood; Institution Building and Effective Participation in Governance; Agricultural Development; Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Conservation, Management and Development; and Respect, Protection and Management of Ancestral Domains. Among the nine programs, three — institution building and effective participation in governance, credit and livelihood — cut across all sectors.

The SRA is trained on enabling the least privileged sectors to meet human needs and live decent lives. For instance, the Comprehensive and Integrated

Delivery Social Services (CIDSS) Project, one of the flagship programs with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as the "Flagship Champion," is aimed at uplifting individuals, families and groups living at the threshold of and below the poverty level. CIDSS is both a program and strategy that is area-focused and utilizes total family approach to empower families through capability building and community organizing to enable them to address their minimum basic needs.

The use of an area-based approach in development saw the emergence and application of the following schemes in social development (Bautista 1994:15-16):

(1) *Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) Approach*. This is a set of indicators juxtaposed with basic needs — survival needs (like food and nutrition, health, water and sanitation, clothing), security needs (shelter, public safety and peace and order, income and livelihood), and enabling needs (basic education and literacy, people's participation in community development, family care/ psychosocial). The approach is designed to monitor the improvement in the quality of life of target clientele;

(2) *Focused Targeting*. This refers to the identification of areas for convergence of social services. It involves the masterlisting of individuals or families, starting with the minimum basic needs standards and who will be the focal persons to receive social services; and

(3) *Community-based Information*. The scheme strengthens data base in the community by enabling the local residents to gather information necessary in monitoring and evaluating interventions of government to advance the social welfare of the people.

As reflected in the SRA, the imperatives of social reform have taken three major paths: (1) increasing people's access to basic human needs; (2) addressing inequities through reform in the ownership, distribution, management, and control of productive resources and broadening economic opportunities for the least disadvantaged sectors; and (3) enhancing political participation of the people by institutionalizing structural changes in the decisionmaking processes.

The Philippine Human Development Report

Inspired by the publication of the UNDP Human Development Report in 1990, an informal multisectoral group of prominent thinkers and development practitioners joined together to organize the Human Development Network (HDN). Given the support of the UNDP, the HDN initiated the preparation and publication of the Philippine Human Development Report (PHDR) in 1994.

The PHDR is an endeavor to assess the state of Philippine human development using the Human Development Index (HDI) as a measurement of socioeconomic progress. This includes the components of human capabilities, viz., longevity and health, knowledge, income, and political freedom and participation. Likewise, the Report identifies the institutional factors and public policies that contribute to or obstruct the attainment of human development objectives.

The PHDR recognized and observed that any social undertaking that will promote genuine human development must be able to resolve the issues of absolute poverty and social equity, sustainability of the environment and natural resources and political participation of the people.

Unresolved Issues and Concerns

Evidently, the government has laid down a comprehensive social development program and enunciated clear policies and strategies in the attempt to improve the quality of life of the disadvantaged and least privileged Filipinos. The direction set for social development seems to be "better" than under previous administrations. However, some important issues remain to be resolved:

(1) *Allocation of funds to social development programs.* The successful operationalization and implementation of avowed social development programs will be determined to a great extent by the available financial resources apart from the political will and determination of both national and local executives to institutionalize a real humane society. The government must put its money where its mouth is, so to speak.

Bautista (1994: 14) noted that the expenditure pattern of the Ramos administration for social development increased to 21 percent covering the fiscal year of 1992-1993 or an improvement of about eight percent over Aquino's administration. Nevertheless, it was not clear how the money was spent. What was the ratio of expenditure between the program's implementation and personnel expenses? Was it the ratio between infrastructure-based projects and direct service delivery? In other words, the ratio between costs and benefits. Under the aegis of devolution, how can local government units (LGUs) account for economic, social and general administrative allocations?

Although 21 percent may be better than under previous administrations, still the government has not relinquished its commitment to foreign creditors to prioritize the payment of debts (including fraudulent ones) over the welfare of the people. The administration persists in allocating about 40 percent of the national budget to foreign debt service.

(2) *Data Sourcing.* The source and the manner of getting information and data as inputs in framing social development programs and policies have significant bearing in evaluating and monitoring achievements relative to social development. Apparently, questions arise when the source of information is incredible or the methodology of culling such is questionable. This is true, for instance, in the case of CIDSS.

How were the disadvantaged groups identified and how can they be distinguished in a community? If income level is a determinant in identifying the "poorest of the poor," how should one treat a family in a community like the indigenous people where cash economy has not penetrated? Can well-being be measured in monetary terms? Oftentimes, the introduction of a cash economy in a community, where exchange of goods and services is governed by customary laws, makes the people "poorer." Social and cultural values may affect people's well-being despite continuous rise in income. Given the limited resources and magnitude of targeted population, how is prioritization made? Is there an objective or subjective measurement in gauging priority sector? How do you test the validity of the measurement used? How does one determine the degree of vulnerability?

(3) *Indicators of empowerment.* Empowerment and promotion of people's participation is considered one of the indicators of MBN. This area should be further improved if indeed we want to gauge the extent of grassroots democracy. Some issues are raised in this regard:

What are the indicators of strength and weakness of an organization? What measures can be adopted to sustain the life of the organization of the poor beyond the project? How can democracy be ensured in an organization and mitigate arbitrary intervention of traditional elite or rulers? In a community where traditional leaders are culturally accepted, will this be construed as elitism? How broadly or narrowly is the scope of rule to be construed?

What kind of participation is envisaged for the poor? What conditions are assumed to be conducive to participation? Can the disincentives and incentives or costs and benefits of participation be equal? What is the appropriate field of democratic activity? What mechanisms are created for those who are avowedly and actively "non-participants"? Are people's participation in elections and involvement in community organizations considered sufficient indicators of empowerment and local democracy? Can political equality be realized in a society where socioeconomic inequalities are pervasive? What is the quality of democracy in a community where people are malnourished, illiterate and homeless?

These are partial questions that must be addressed squarely if indeed empowerment and people's participation is the goal of social development. In other words, indicators must go beyond statistics. In fact, the truth behind, beneath and beyond statistics must be unraveled.

The direction of Philippine social development has been identified. How we go there demands fullest commitment not only from national and local leaders but the people themselves. The people must be determined to liberate themselves from the quagmire of poverty, ignorance and powerlessness with or without government's assistance. After all, the people are not only the makers of history but also the creators of their destiny. The future lies in their own hands.

Endnotes

¹Social Development Defined (class handout, mimeographed).

²Social capital, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), refers to voluntary forms of social regulation, i.e., collective decisions, public action, political participation, governance or institutional capacity. The formation of social capital has to do with strengthening the process and capability of both government workers and civil society participants, especially nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), people's organizations (POs), cooperatives and the church, in making collective decisions. The enhancement of social capital entails the participation of different development players in different areas, mutually sustaining each other's collective efforts and at the same time integrating them to form a synergy. It is perceived that social capital, reinforced by social support, status, honor and other rewards, will sustain human endeavors.

³The improvement in human well-being is normally noted when incomes rise or when command over commodities expands. However, well-being is not always reducible to the amount of commodities or basket of goods a household can buy. Several factors, which are equally important, must be considered in determining the level of individual's or household's well-being. The geographical availability of public services and facilities, social and cultural values, demographic factors, psychological state, to mention a few, may contribute to miserable conditions of health, nutrition, housing, or literacy despite relatively high income.

⁴This measure is part of the Manila Declaration on the Agenda for Action for Social Development. Likewise, this was indicated in the National Report on Social Development.

⁵These are the landless farmers and rural workers, subsistence fisherfolks, urban poor, indigenous peoples, workers in the informal sector and all other disadvantaged groups (i.e., women, youth and students, disabled, elderly, victims of calamities and disasters).

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