

## *Book Review*

# **Combating Poverty Through CIDSS**

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A review of Victoria A. Bautista, *Combating Poverty Through the Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS)*. Quezon City: UP National College of Public Administration and Governance, 1999, 320 pp.

I am pleased to review the book by Dr. Victoria A. Bautista and her close involvement with the CIDSS and MBN systems over many years will know that in a sense this also represents a self-assessment of her work and intervention over the past years. Yet I am sure this fact has not clouded her objectivity as a scholar. Indeed the tone of the book is decidedly clinical, perhaps also since this is a report commissioned by the DSWD. DSWD is also to be commended for the openness and candor it possessed in evaluating its own programs.

The main question to be answered is a simple one: whether the CIDSS as an approach makes a difference or not. To test this proposition, a with-and-without experiment is made of barangays that benefited from the CIDSS, with a control group consisting of barangays not covered by the CIDSS. The principal measure is the change in MBN measures.

At the outset, there may be three areas where questions of methodology may be raised: (a) the first is possible selection bias: there probably needs to be further explanation why it is thought that the higher per capita-income and lower population of municipalities in the CIDSS sample or class of municipality would not result in bias (perhaps it may be included as a variable in the regression); (b) the measure of improvement; while there is nothing wrong with using the own-MBN as a measure of improvement, it would have been desirable to have corroborating information from other sources than the experiment itself, since, after all, the MBN is also embedded in the CIDSS approach.

Notwithstanding these and other possible cavils about methodology that may be expressed, any reader cannot but express admiration for the almost singular occurrence of a government antipoverty approach being assessed over a significant

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period of time (5 years). This is much more than might be expected of most social programs run by government, whose designs are often dictated by political considerations, and whose effects are rarely monitored and assessed, if ever, though they may run for any number of years, and which are then silently discontinued as a passing fad.

The Philippines has experimented with one or another "antipoverty strategy" for many years, as political fashion dictates. Things would be harmless enough if all that occurred was to replace the program titles with the initials of the powers that be – but otherwise retained the direction and focus of such programs. For some inexplicable reason, however, each incoming administration seems always to be afflicted by amnesia and feels the urge to start from scratch every time, as if nothing were known or learned about combating poverty in the past.

While this cannot be tested, I would also venture that the CIDSS is successful for two additional *negative* reasons: (a) It has maintained a low profile: this has meant that it has been less of a target of politicization. Among others, it also means that the targeting of beneficiaries has been accomplished on a more objective basis. Related to the first, (b) the program has a low level of funding: indeed (Table 2.4) the average amounts released per family appears to have been declining (from P2,300 in 1994 to P642 in 1998). With few morsels to attract the flies, the program has been allowed to proceed quietly on its own terms. Indeed, this much is suggested by the regression results: the most important contribution of the program was actually mobilization of the community and its organizations.

These lessons are a contrast to some disturbing preoccupations in the government's current antipoverty efforts, which appears to give too prominent a role to politicians—governors, city mayors, and members of congress—in selecting beneficiaries, and which advertise large amounts of funds for credit and livelihood, without an appreciation of the social mobilization required for their effective utilization.

Dr. Bautista's solid documentation and assessment of the CIDSS poses a challenge for those in charge of the new administration's much-vaunted antipoverty programs. Given any sort of fair-mindedness, people currently in authority ought to take a look at the result of Dr. Bautista's studies of a rare enough phenomenon, a government sponsored approach that has actually worked, and they should strive hard to replicate it—paying attention, of course, to the scarce resource that it uses intensively, namely human resources and goodwill. On the other hand, one can understand if the politically narrow-minded will regard CIDSS and Dr. Bautista's efforts not as a triumph but a dilemma—namely what to do with a solid and successful piece of work for which unfortunately no one is not directly responsible.

## *Book Review*

# **The Civil Service in Hong Kong: Continuity and Change**

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A review of Ahmed Shafiqul Huque, Grace O.M. Lee and Anthony B.L. Cheung, *The Civil Service in Hong Kong: Continuity and Change* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998, 189 pp.).

The book under review is the recent work of Dr. Huque and his colleagues which provides with a comprehensive and encyclopedic overview of the organization, development, ever changing issues, problems and prospects of civil service in Hong Kong. *The Civil Service in Hong Kong: Continuity and Change* is an incisive, creative, thought provoking work about the origin and development of civil service and efforts to deal with change prior to and after transition. Huque probes how efforts are made to improve the effectiveness of civil service in Hong Kong and how public services are managed inspite of their changing roles and responsibilities. The goal of the authors is to prepare the civil services not only to meet with the present challenges effectively but also anticipate their future role and prepare themselves accordingly. This book is a well-timed and ambitious venture. After transition, Hong Kong civil services have seen many problems. There have been various blunders committed which have questioned the efficiency of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) and there is a demand for a better and more effective administration. This book is a blessing in disguise as it states the problems and updates on the information of the civil services. There are traces of future problems anticipated. Solutions to how problems should be addressed are mentioned.

The authors draw their commentary from government documents, scholarly insights of others, detailed discussions of the crucial tasks and issues confronting the institution. The authors carefully blend these ingredients and deliver a first-rate account of how civil services work today and how it has evolved over a period of time.

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This book is divided into nine chapters. Chapter one is a broad introduction, which demonstrates the need for such a study. References are made on prior researches conducted on the civil services of Hong Kong. This chapter sets a tone for discussion. The second chapter deals with the origin and history, which provides insights into the evolution and present stage of civil services in Hong Kong. Chapter three further explores the challenges encountered by the civil service owing to the changes taking place in Hong Kong due to the transition. The author argues that with transition there is a greater demand for political accountability, emphasis on forces of "mainlandization," globalization and at the same time desire to preserve its distinct local identity. The author further argues that the political and administrative structure of the SAR civil service has become more complex and multifaceted. Thus these constitute the major challenges to the civil services.

Chapters four to seven focus on various efforts to improve the effectiveness of civil services, before and after transition. Chapter four highlights the two major steps taken by the Hong Kong civil services to prepare itself for transition. The first is that a new dimension on training of civil servants has been adopted where more opportunities to familiarize them with the government and society of China have been made. The second approach is the acceleration of the localization process. The authors state that the preparation for change is inadequate and further preparation is necessary. The authors question the merits of localization by stating, "localization causes stress and strains within the civil services. There will be a loss of talent and experience (p. 81). Chapter five deals with issues like problems of succession. The civil services are to plan for filling positions that could fall vacant owing to localization, retirement and departure of senior civil servants. Chapter six discusses the principles and practices of pay determination within the broad context of management of performance reward. Chapter seven examines methods of improving public sector management. It describes the government's efforts to establish a more service-oriented culture in the civil services. Chapter eight targets at looking into the future role of senior civil servants. As pointed out by Peter Barberis (1997: 150), "As a rule, the further into the future we look, the greater the chances of our being confounded. Yet without mortgaging our credibility beyond redemption we can make certain projections, given the present drift of events." Cheung predicts that the civil servants will have to play a dual role, i.e. of a "policymaker" and an "administrator." Chapter nine concludes the book by highlighting the arguments, issues, problems and challenges, etc. from the previous chapters.

The book has a comprehensive scope and updates the information on civil services in Hong Kong. The literature available in this book bridges the loopholes and gaps present in the existing literature by providing new information along with analytical approach to hurdles, obstacles, and provocation faced by civil services in Hong Kong. The book covers all aspects and is diversified. The personnel system,

the governance of service and position of civil service in the political community are discussed.

Though the book contains a few minor factual errors, it is an extremely valuable source for academics, civil servants, professionals and students. It also interests researchers interested in the role of civil servants in the changing societies. All essays in this book are strong and together they paint a vivid portrait of civil service in Hong Kong. In short, the book provides plenty of "foods for thought" for anyone interested in politics, public administration and Asian affairs.

### Reference

Barberis, Peter

1997 *Civil Service in an Era of Change*. Vermont, USA: Dartmouth Publishing Company, Ltd.