

# **A Critique of the Local Poverty Diagnosis and Planning System**

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*The plight of poverty in the country has reached a very serious state. Local government units (LGUs) are now faced with the challenge of devising a plan to alleviate poverty in their specific localities. A guidebook on Local Poverty Diagnosis and Planning System (LPDPS) was launched by President Arroyo in 2003 to aid LGUs in the formulation of their local plans in poverty reduction in their areas. This article evaluates the guidebook of LPDPS by way of analyzing its commendable attributes and its deficiencies in directing an effective method in assessing the extent of poverty and deprivation in the municipality. It points out the importance of the role of community mobilization, barangay participation in the data collection system, focused targeting of underserved individuals and families in the community, role of local chief executives, formulation of minimum basic needs for facilities, development plans consolidation, and adoption of poverty indicators in allocating resources. The author stresses that the responsibility for poverty alleviation should not only lie with the national government, but, it should be more importantly initiated by the LGUs where poor families and their unfortunate situations are evident. By doing this, all the local heads will help the government in identifying which projects need immediate attention.*

## **Background**

The Local Poverty Diagnosis and Planning System (LPDPS) is a methodology for formulating a poverty alleviation plan advocated to local government units (LGUs). This was formally adopted by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), together with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), through the support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under its project called *Strengthening Local Government's Capacity for the Formulation of Poverty-Focused Plans*. The methodology, institutional mechanisms, and indicators to assess poverty advocated to LGUs are embodied in a *Guidebook on Local Poverty Diagnosis and Planning* issued in December 2002. The Guidebook was formally launched by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in July 2003. The Guidebook

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was formulated with the assistance of Dr. Celia M. Reyes, who serves as the leader of the Community-based Monitoring System International Network sponsored by the International Development Research Center of Canada; and, Ms. Ma. Loreto M. Padua, former Executive Director of the Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS) and currently a faculty member of the College of Social Work and Community Development of the University of the Philippines Diliman.

This Guidebook is recommended to LGUs as a management technology which could guide them in the formulation of local plans for poverty alleviation. It responds to the call for local chief executives (LCEs) to undertake local programs on poverty reduction and local economic transformation issued by the DILG on 21 August 2001 through Memorandum Circular No. 2001-109 (DILG 2002: 6). This was supplemented by another directive by the DILG that called for the appointment of a Local Poverty Reduction Action Officer (LPRAO) in all municipalities, cities, and provinces to oversee the poverty reduction efforts in their respective localities through Memorandum Circular 2001-105 by the DILG issued on 31 August 2001 (DILG 2002: 6).

### **Laudable Features**

The LPDPS bears many laudable features that foster good governance.

#### *Rational Decisionmaking*

One feature is the advocacy of a set of indicators which could guide and steer rational decisionmaking in local planning process and in targeting localities and families/individuals that can be given priority attention. A total of 13 sets of indicators are reminiscent of the key dimensions of the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) set of indicators used by the CIDSS, a program institutionalized under the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act passed in 1997, as the service delivery mechanism for MBN. As of April 2004, an additional indicator was added (on maternal mortality rate) to capture the commitments of the Millennium Development Goals. (See Appendix A for the list of LPIMS and MBN indicators.) This set of indicators was also advocated to LGUs by the DILG in localities that were not supported by the CIDSS under the Ramos Administration and with its own Guidebook formulated to set up the Community-Based Information System (CBIS). Unlike CBIS, CIDSS takes care of preparing the community to get involved in the different steps of the management cycle such as situation analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation (SAPIME).

MBN was also adopted and modified through NEDA and the National Statistics Office project supported by the UNDP in pilot areas where a Community-Based Poverty Indicators Monitoring System (CBPIMS) was set up. CBPIMS used only 23 out of 33 MBN indicators in the household survey. The rest was culled from community informants because of the sensitivity of asking questions from the households themselves. These indicators were questions on (a) families victimized by crimes against person and property, armed conflict, domestic violence and calamities; (b) households with zero to six-year-old children left unattended and children engaged in hazardous occupation; (c) participation in the last elections; (d) single parents who used health care services; and (e) having three sets of clothing. CBPIMS also corrected the weakness of MBN in using the family as unit of analysis by counting the actual number of persons affected by a given unmet MBN (i.e., number of children who were not immunized instead of whether or not families have children who were not immunized).

The dimensions in Local Poverty Indicators Monitoring Systems (LPIMS) are survival, including such dimensions as health, nutrition and basic health/nutrition amenities; security through shelter and peace/order; and enabling factors such as income, employment and education. MBN indicators likewise have three dimensions such as survival which includes clothing, health, nutrition and water and sanitation (with water and sanitation labeled as health and nutrition as amenities); security, that includes income/livelihood other than shelter and peace and order; and enabling factors that include people participation in community development and family care/psychosocial welfare, other than education.

With the set of indicators trimmed down, the data-collection process can now be easily facilitated, rather than collecting data on all 33 indicators.

Furthermore, the indicators are more focused on initial impact or long-term effect of services delivered, unlike the MBN set of indicators which incorporates outputs/services (i.e., pregnant and lactating mothers provided with iron and iodine supplements, infants exclusively breastfed for at least 4 months, deliveries attended by trained personnel, 0-1 year old infants fully immunized, pregnant mothers given two doses of tetanus toxoid, couples' access to family planning services, and no child below 7 years old left unattended) and initial effects (i.e., not more than one diarrhea episode per child below 5 years of age, no child below 15 years old engaged in hazardous occupation and couples practicing family planning).

An edge of LPIMS over MBN is its objective of counting the number of persons affected by a given indicator, such as determining the number of malnourished as per the total number of children in the 0-6 bracket years of age vis-à-vis looking at whether or not there were severely or moderately malnourished children per family.

In addition, LPIMS also gives an opportunity for peculiar needs of certain sectors to be added to the list of indicators such as proportion of households with access to ancestral domain for indigenous communities; proportion of farm households who are landless, among agricultural barangays; and proportion of households affected by natural disaster, in localities that are prone to natural disasters.

Like the MBN set of indicators, data on LPIMS are to be collected at the level of the barangay, with suggestions to collect the data in smaller patches in the community such as *puroks*. Having information gathered at the community-level ensures that the data capture the peculiar requirements of the community and lead to the formulation of plans responsive to the needs of the community.

Having a set of indicators could also ensure transparency in terms of the performance of the LGU as data are available to track down the progress on quality of life.

### *Convergence Principle*

Another feature of the methodology is the adoption of the convergence principle which is also a prominent feature in CIDSS and in MBN-CBIS advocated by the DILG. This is to be translated by setting up an interagency committee called the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT) at the barangay and municipal levels, normally composed of officials performing executive functions in LGUs, officials of the local legislative body, local technical staff, community volunteers, and representatives from the different basic sectors (i.e., farmers, agrarian reform families, fisher folk, formal and informal labor, children, youth, women, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, victims of calamities, and indigenous people). The basic sectors are often marginalized, depressed or underserved groups in the community, officially recognized in the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act. The involvement of the basic sectors is significant because it stresses the importance of these groups to be actively involved in the local teams that oversee the overall effort in poverty alleviation. Furthermore, people participation in governance is also encouraged by enabling *sitio* leaders to take part in the *barangay* LPRAT. Unlike basic sector representatives, *sitio* leaders are expected to have a holistic view of the requirements of their respective localities, and could cut across the needs of the different basic sectors.

Convergence is advantageous as it assures that services are maximized since different workers operate as a team to avoid duplication and overlap of functions. Convergent efforts also foster camaraderie among the members of

the team and facilitate diffusion of information about the concerns of every stakeholder.

Members of the barangay LPRAT are from 1) LGU officials with executive functions such as the Barangay Captain and the Barangay Secretary; 2) the local *sanggunian* that includes the Chair of the Appropriations Committee of the barangay; 3) local technical staff (Chair of the committees of education, health, water and sanitation of the Barangay Development Council); 4) representative from the national government (School Principal/Head Teacher); 5) barangay volunteers such as Barangay Health Worker, Barangay Nutrition Scholar, Day Care Worker, Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer and other community volunteers; 6) basic sector representatives; and 7) other people's organization (PO) groups such as *sitio* leaders.

At the municipal level, the members of the LPRAT include: 1) local government officials represented by the Municipal Poverty Reduction Action Officer (MPRAO), Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator, Municipal Local Government Operations Officer, barangay captains of all barangays, and barangay secretaries; 2) the local *sanggunian* through the Chair of Appropriations Committee, 3) local technical staff through Chair of the various committees of the local development council and the Department Heads of the municipal government offices; 4) national government representative through the School Principal/Head Teacher; 5) basic sectors through their barangay sectoral representative; and 6) nongovernment organization (NGO) and PO representatives of the local development council. (See Appendix B for the list of members in the LPRAT at the municipal and barangay levels.)

Thus, it is important for basic sector members at the barangay level to be organized to ensure that they are represented in the barangay. This is necessary for them to identify their representative in the municipal LPRAT.

### *Empowerment Principle*

An important feature of the LPIMS is the inclusion of basic sector representatives in both the barangay and municipal LPRATs. Their interface enables marginalized groups to have a role in the different phases of the management cycle—in identifying the indicators to assess poverty in the visioning process, in program/project identification, and in the identification of resources needed to undertake projects. The involvement of the basic sectors provides an opportunity for marginalized groups to make decisions on how their respective problems could be solved, avoiding mendicancy or dependence on government, and ensuring relevant intervention in addressing

their problems. Sitio leaders could also supplement the perspective of the basic sector representatives.

### *Management Approach as Against Program-based Strategy*

Considering the advocacy of the LPDPS Guidebook for each municipality to go through the process of tracing the root cause of each unmet basic need, based on the indicators on LPIMS or similar tools, the approach highlights the importance of making each local poverty alleviation team focus on their own perception and understanding of the problem, rather than using the perspective of the national government. It encourages each team, particularly the municipal LPRAT, to identify programs and projects that could respond to the root cause of the problem. The Guidebook does not impose or even recommend specific programs and projects to address these problems. Thus, the approach increases the possibility of responsiveness of the programs and projects since the direct beneficiaries participate in their identification.

### *Assessment of Capabilities/Opportunities*

One of the laudable features of the Guidebook is the identification of possible "coping mechanisms" to deal with each problem and of opportunities for resources available in the locality, in preparation for the identification of concrete measures or programs/projects that can be initiated to respond to the problem. Assessment of project feasibility can now be possible by mapping these opportunities. Thus, plans do not remain as desired states but constitute realizable instruments.

### *Resource Mobilization*

Another important feature of the Guidebook is the inclusion of information on the possible ways to raise local resources that can be tapped to finance the local poverty alleviation plan. Identified financing options do not only include local (i.e., internal revenue allotment, local taxes and revenues, and loans) and national financing schemes (i.e., national funds and loans). They also include private sector funds through such mechanisms as having the private sector build, own and operate (BOO) projects; apply Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) option as it is given an opportunity to invest in a local government project, and recover from the investment before it is transferred to the LGU; and espouse government support for commercial and business undertakings. Tapping official development assistance (ODA) is also suggested as an option with a project listing being provided to give the Guidebook users an idea of different projects which are extended grants or loans.

Indicating opportunities to generate resources enables LGUs to take the initiative to support their projects, on the principle of autonomy.

### *Opportunity for Other Methodologies to be Used*

Another important contribution of LPDPS is its relative openness in recognizing existing indicator systems which are operational in the LGUs. The Guidebook compares four indicators, apart from the LPIMS. The first three are indicators advocated by the national government at one time or another. These are MBN-CBIS, CBPIMS and the Integrated Rural Accessibility Program (IRAP). As the name suggests, the indicators adopted in IRAP focus on the “accessibility” of the facilities/services of each basic need dimension (i.e., number of schools in each barangay, travel time to reach a health service), rather than focusing on the condition of individuals/families in relation to their basic needs, which MBN and CBPIMS are able to do. The fourth set of indicators is used by the Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic Adjustment Policies (MIMAP) Project that targets selected localities in the Philippines.

These four sets of indicators are compared on such dimensions as survival, security and enabling needs. Apart from LPIMS, a comparison of the four sets of indicators reveals that MBN-CBIS is the most participatory in data collection. MIMAP and CBPIMS rely on paid enumerators, while IRAP depends on key informants whose views could be “parochial” in character (DILG 2002: Annex IIB).

It can be deduced that the set of indicators adopted in the LPIMS has been largely influenced by the set of indicators of MIMAP.

### *Linking Poverty Alleviation with the Comprehensive Development Plan*

An important feature of the LPDPS is that it links the visioning exercise with the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP), ensuring that there is consistency between the two. The existing programs are revisited and tied up with new programs, and then prioritized according to the criteria agreed upon. Suggested criteria include replicability, sustainability, participatory process, and number of people benefiting from the program/project.

## **Deficiencies**

Considering all these laudable features, a few gaps and deficiencies of LPDPS still remain.

### *Municipal-based Planning*

One weakness of the LPDPS is its emphasis on the municipality's role in the preparation of the poverty alleviation plan. The mechanism for the formulation of the plan highlights the municipality's role in consolidating the different barangay LPIMS data or other related data; in assessing coping mechanisms and development opportunities; conducting cause analysis of the key unmet MBNs; preparation of the development plan for poverty reduction; and in the identification of resources to undertake the program/projects prioritized. However, the role of the barangay in the formulation of a poverty alleviation plan is not indicated. Unlike the MBN-CBIS, it utilizes the data at this level for both planning and targeting purposes, like in MBN-CIDSS.

### *Focused Targeting of Individuals and Families*

Unlike the MBN-CBIS, the modalities in processing data for identifying individuals/families that can be given priority are not given much attention in LPDPS. This could be attributed to the fact that the consolidation of the data occurs at the municipal level. Hence, responding to the needs of individuals and families is not clearly spelled out in the LPDPS, which defeats the purpose of seeking out the most marginalized in a poverty reduction agenda.

### *Community Mobilization/Preparation*

While the LPDPS recognizes the importance of the basic sector interface in governance, there is a need to ensure that the community is prepared to operate as organized groups. Setting up the LPDPS without due regard to community organizing will only pay lip service to people participation in governance. Our evaluation of the CIDSS in 1999 (Bautista 1999) has shown the impact of community preparation on the depth of community involvement in the different phases of governance compared with the advocacy of MBN through setting up CBIS, that did not give due emphasis on community mobilization.

## **Recommendations**

In the light of these weaknesses and gaps, the following are recommended in order to strengthen the LPDPS, which should be pushed more aggressively:

### *Role of Community Mobilization*

There is a need to incorporate community mobilization in order to ensure that participatory governance principle permeates the crafting of the poverty



agenda. This should also include advocacy of the principle to the local chief executive, who can give the directive to a community mobilizer in undertaking this task, possibly from an NGO or a Social Welfare and Development Officer.

### *Barangay-led Planning*

There is a need to revise the Guidebook to take into consideration the important role of the barangay in the planning process. To ensure that the information system is community-based, the LPDPS should not only consider the barangay as a source of information, it is also at this level that the data collected can be analyzed and processed by the community. Therefore, cause analysis can be undertaken, and ultimately, relevant plans and projects can be identified at the barangay level. The municipality can serve as a venue for negotiation among the members of the barangay LPRAT regarding the projects that can be prioritized by the municipality, taking into account the concerns/problems of the different barangays. Planning should be barangay-led and not municipal-led. Hence, there is a need to advocate the full cycle of the methodology of LPDPS not only to the municipality but also to the barangay level.

### *Focused Targeting of Individuals/Families*

There is a need to strengthen the system of focused targeting for affected individuals, families or basic sectors. The technology of dealing with the marginalized, depressed, deprived and underserved individuals and families should be explicitly incorporated in the Guidebook. It should not simply be assessed that it will be done. Experiences in CIDSS or other local initiatives can be included to apply the methodology of targeting to ensure that users of the Guidebook can demonstrate how targeting can be done.

### *Formulating MBN for Facilities*

It may sound like a broken record, but this article aims to reiterate a point raised in different fora on the need to formulate basic facilities indicators. If there are basic needs indicators for individuals and families, there is also a need to define the standards required for facilities to respond to individual needs. Human needs can be effectively addressed if there are enough facilities to address these needs. For instance, a day care center per barangay cannot sufficiently address the needs of children if there is a big population of children in the barangay. The IRAP is a good starting point since it has already incorporated access to facilities, but standards for these facilities have not yet been formulated.

### *Role of Local Chief Executives*

Being the key persons to appoint the LPRAO, the LCEs have a critical role in steering and directing the formulation of plans for poverty alleviation. They are also responsible for advocating and directing the allocation of resources for poverty alleviation. Hence, it is important to have a vigorous promotion on this separate advocacy for the LCEs in order for the whole effort on poverty reduction to be truly successful.

### *Consolidation of Development Plans*

There are several plans expected to be crafted by LGUs. Aside from the regular plans like the Comprehensive Development Plan, Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Provincial Physical Framework Plan, and Annual Investment Plan, the LGUs are expected to produce the Local Public Safety Plan, Gender Plan, Local Enterprise Plan, Sustainable Integrated Area Development Plan, apart from the Local Poverty Plan (Garganera 2004: 119). There is a need to consolidate these different plans to avoid confusion and to present an integrated view of the needs of the locality. The Comprehensive Development Plan can consolidate all these plans, with a poverty perspective permeating other plans, due to the fact that poverty is an overriding concern.

### *Adoption of Poverty Indicators in Allocating Resources*

There is a need to advocate to national implementers of the executive branch of government the set of indicators as the bases for the identification of localities that should be given attention and programs to prioritize. Even the legislature can be steered to adopt the set of indicators as a basis for decisionmaking in terms of the localities and the services that they can provide allocation from their pork barrel funds. The indicators provide rational criteria to ensure that priority attention is extended to the marginalized by key decisionmakers.

## **Conclusion**

The LPDPS is a management technology that can be harnessed to ensure that LGUs formulate a plan from a poverty perspective. Poverty alleviation should not only be a responsibility of the national government but should be lodged in LGUs where the poor are located. Innovative local government officials can be directed by the LPDPS framework to respond to the plight of the poor in a more innovative way—capitalizing on such principles as people participation, focused targeting, convergence, and human development.

Having a poverty focus in a development plan actually ensures that the resources are channeled to marginalized people, to lift them from the burden of deprivation and ultimately, to equip them with capacities to be liberated from the bondage of poverty.

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## Appendix A

## MBN indicators

<i>Basic Needs</i>	<i>MBN Indicators</i>	<i>LPIMS</i>
<i>Survival</i>		
A. Food and Nutrition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Newborns with birthweight of at least 2.5 kg.</li> <li>2. No severely and moderately underweight children under five years old</li> <li>3. Pregnant and lactating mothers provided with iron and iodine supplements</li> <li>4. Infants breastfed for at least four months</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Malnutrition prevalence- Proportion of children 0-5 years old who are moderately and severely underweight</li> </ol>
B. Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Deliveries attended by trained personnel</li> <li>6. 0-1 years old fully immunized</li> <li>7. Pregnant women given at least 2 doses of tetanus toxoid</li> <li>8. Not more than one diarrhea episode per child below five</li> <li>9. No deaths in the family due to preventable causes</li> <li>10. Couples with access to family planning</li> <li>11. Couples practicing family planning in the last six months</li> <li>12. Solo parent availing of health services</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Proportion of children aged 0-5 years old who died to the sum of children 0-5 years old</li> <li>3. Proportion of women deaths due to pregnancy related causes</li> </ol>
C. Water and Sanitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Access to potable water (faucet/deep well within 250 meters)</li> <li>14. Access to sanitary toilets</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Proportion of households without access to safe water</li> <li>5. Proportion of households without access to sanitary toilet facilities</li> </ol>
D. Clothing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Family members with basic clothing (at least three sets of internal and external clothing)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Proportion of households who are squatters</li> <li>7. Proportion of households who are living in makeshift housing</li> </ol>
<i>Security</i>		
A. Shelter	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. House owned, rented or shared</li> <li>17. Housing durable for at least five years</li> </ol>	

B. Peace and Order/ Public Safety	18. No family member victimized by crime against person 19. No family member victimized by crime against property 20. No family member displaced by natural disaster 21. No family member victimized by armed conflict	8. Proportion of households victimized by crime
C. Income and Employment	22. Head of family employed 23. Other family members 15 years old and above employed 24. Families with income above subsistence threshold level	9. Poverty incidence— Proportion of households who have income lesser than the poverty threshold 10. Subsistence incidence – Proportion of households who have income lesser than the food threshold 11. Proportion of households who eat three meals a day 12. Unemployment rate
<i>Enabling</i>		
A. Basic Education and Literacy	25. Children aged 3-6 attending daycare/preschool 26. Children 6-12 years old in elementary school 27. Children 13-16 years old in high school 28. Family members 10 years old above able to read and write and do simple calculation	13. Proportion of 6-12 children who are not in elementary school 14. Proportion of 13-16 years olds who are not in secondary schools
B. People's Participation	29. Family members involved in at least one people's organization 30. Family members able to vote in elections	
C. Family Care/ Psycho-social Needs	31. Children 18 years old and below not engaged in hazardous occupation 32. No incidence of domestic violence 33. No child below seven years old left unattended	

*Appendix B***Suggested Members of the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team**

<i>Institutions Represented</i>	<i>Barangay Poverty Reduction Action Team</i>	<i>Municipal Poverty Reduction Action Team</i>
LGU Key Officials with Executive Function	Barangay Captain Barangay Secretary	MPRAO Municipal Planning Development Coordinator Municipal LG Operations Officer Barangay Captains Barangay Secretaries
LGU Sanggunian	Chair of Appropriations Committee Members of the Sanggunian	Chair of Appropriations Committee
LGU Technical Staff	Chair of Committees on Education, Health, Water and Sanitation	Chair of Committees on Education, Health, Water and Sanitation Department Heads of the Municipality
National Government	School Principal/Head Teacher	Chair of Committees on Education, Health, Water and Sanitation
Basic Sectors	Representatives of the Basic Sectors	Barangay Sectoral Representative
Other POs/Civil Society Groups	Purok or Sitio Leaders	NGO/PO representatives in the municipal development council
Barangay Volunteers	Barangay Health Worker Barangay Nutrition Scholar Day Care Worker Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer Other Community Workers	
Private Sector		Private sector representative in the municipal development council