



# THE PH SDG AGENDA: CLOSING GAPS, OVERCOMING POLICY INCOHERENCE







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*With the support of:*



ASIA CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (APSD)



ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT

**THE PH SDG AGENDA:**

Closing Gaps, Overcoming Policy Incoherence

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# FOREWORD

This volume of Social Watch’s Spotlight Report on how we are faring with on our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) carries a lot of poignancy.

Isagani Serrano, or Gani as he was fondly called by colleagues and friends, has traditionally written the foreword of the citizen’s report of Social Watch Philippines. Before leaving for the Great Beyond in February this year, however, Gani still found the physical strength to warn about the challenges the country faces and exhort colleagues, comrades and friends about what must and can be done. A quintessential environmentalist, rural development and climate advocate, Gani, as we fondly called him, never failed to inspire and challenge us in our ways of doing things and changing mind sets. Our friends from the Focus on Global South aptly wrote days after his demise, “Gani contributed immensely through his life and work, especially with rural communities, to the task of building people’s movements aspiring for, to use his words, ‘fairness in a fragile world’ “.

Still, we were lucky to have Gani’s words of wisdom kick off the series of Social Watch-initiated consultations to contribute to the country’s Voluntary National Review process this year. In this volume, we are publishing in full Gani’s very own words read by his partner, Lisa Dacanay last 7 February 2019.

I can never fill in Gani’s large shoes in terms of depth and understanding of the complex problems this world faces and the kind of prose by which he expresses them but I am nonetheless extremely privileged to introduce this year’s Spotlight Report. It is, as it has always been, a product of several consultations that were actively participated in by traditional and new participants in the civil society groups’ discourse on the then MDGs (Millennium Development Goals), now SDGs.

The UN review process in New York this July focuses on six out of the 17 SDGs. This six are Goal 4 on Quality Education, Goal 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10 on Inequality, Goal 13 on Climate Change, Goal 16 on Peace and Goal 17 on Global Partnerships. As of this writing, except for Goal 16, we are able to pitch in on the other five SDGs.

The article on education pointedly asked the question “(W)ill equity in education be finally achieved?” Quite telling is the convoluted result of the recently enacted law that provided for free tuition in state-owned universities and colleges. Education Network (E-Net) in their article wrote, “even if tuition fees are now free in the public higher education institutions,

they are mostly serving rich and middle-income families. Only 12% of these SUCs' student populations are from poor families. Data also shows that the increasing number of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) is not correlated with either increase in enrolment in higher education nor with enrolment of students from poor households."

The discussion on Goal 8 with regard to decent work is a good segue to Goal 4's discussion as Education should rightly be linked with the kind of jobs that our people end up with, given the kind of educational system we have. Social Watch's Co-Convenor, Dr. Marivic Raquiza's incisive analysis which combined Goals 8 and 10, focused on how people tend to hammer on poverty but not so much on inequality which, by and large, has been the circuitous cause of greater poverty. The "trickle-down" theory just does not work, my colleague, Marivic asserts. Our partner organizations from the differently-abled sectors provided their perspective in the shaping of Marivic's paper.

Engineer Roberto "Obet" Verzola took by the horns the discussion on Goal 13 on Climate Action. It was quite an eye-opener to read his article on how the Executive has mangled the implementation of the Renewable Energy Law to the point that one would think that the law was a failure in shifting our energy mix to more renewables when in fact, it was a failure of the implementers, not the policy. One can't help but nod on other simple, no non-sense solutions that Obet ran down like planting trees, garbage segregation, going organic for agriculture and implementing to the letter the Renewable Energy Act taking into account the successful models from Germany and other countries.

I did my bit in this volume by contributing and harnessing inputs from Social Watch partners on Goal 17 – Global Partnerships. On the balance, our trade and current accounts look unsustainable and it will be so, so long as we just "go with the flow" and not clearly define where we are and where we want to be as a people and as a nation. Debt and illicit financial flows should be closely watched.

This volume also carries what we would proudly call "value-added articles" coming from our partner networks that do extensive work on Indigenous Peoples, Children and Tobacco Control.

The report on children highlights the progress on the child- focused targets for the SDGs, the obstacles to achieving these targets, and recommendations to ensure that the targets are being delivered to, and directly benefitting children. We thank Save the Children and the children who participated in the consultations, for such an extensive, well-written report.

Written in the first person, indigenous people's perspective, Eaterluna "Chy"Canoy brings down to brass tacks the SDGs and challenges us to talk and consult with tribal leaders for common sensical solutions to global problems.

The ending article to this volume is the paper written by our Social Watch staff, John Christian Payumo entitled "Tobacco Control: A Leverage to Attain SDGs in the Philippines." The paper goes beyond just saying tax tobacco to the max to generate revenues to finance health expenditure but intelligently identifies how tobacco, the industry, smoking, the use of the land for its production actually aggravates our ecological balance, our people's health and even climate change.

We would like to believe that the articles found in this report are consistent with the vision, analyses and recommendations that Gani has advocated throughout his life. Together with our CSO partners, it is our contribution to helping shape a people-centered 2030 Agenda for the country.

I humbly invite you all to carefully read all the articles most especially the recommendations as we always try to find ways to work together, eliminate the great divide in incomes and wealth and leave no one behind.



**Jessica Reyes-Cantos**

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# SDG in three years of DU30<sup>1</sup>

**Isagani R. Serrano**

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**W**ith a huge mandate to back it up, the government of President Duterte (PRRD or DU30) set off on a long-term goal of ending poverty by 2040, not 2030, and building a more fair, prosperous, stable and peaceful society through inclusive economic growth that minds environmental limits.

Three years down the road, DU30 appears on track with its 7-8 percent annual economic growth target because of its massive ‘build, build, build” infrastructure program accounting for 5.4 percent of GDP in 2017. This has been the biggest net regional transfer across all post-Marcos regimes and augurs well for regional development and reducing inequality at least by geography, if not by class. This is specially true for Mindanao and the areas covered by the Bangsa Moro Organic Law.

The negative impact of this massive infrastructure program, specifically conversion to other land uses of already diminishing farmlands, is still to be determined. But one emerging impact has been the movement of the rural poor from agriculture to the construction industry and the disruption of agricultural value chain development initiatives of small producers that have been neglected by the state for a long time. All told, spending in agriculture, where most of the poorest derive their livelihood is disappointing for a country wishing to achieve green industrialization. One could also foresee that the fossil-intensive infrastructure and power programs and projects could reverse modest gains achieved in environmental protection and rehabilitation.

Spending on the social sector was 8.5 percent of GDP. Top priority is yet to be given to light infrastructures, like rural roads, water and sanitation, and home electricity, which impact more directly on the lives of the poor and excluded. There is no firm indication as yet whether and how the promised poverty reduction from 21.6 percent to 14 percent by 2022 will be achieved on a year to year basis. Remittances from overseas Filipinos—a record-setting \$28.1 billion in 2017, a 4.3 percent increase from \$26.9 billion in 2016---keep the economy going mainly by financing family consumption and, potentially, the growth of the local economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Opening Remarks delivered during the CSO Consultation Workshop on “Towards Coherent Policies for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Philippines: CSO Inputs to the Voluntary National Review, February 7, 2019, Hive Hotel and Convention Place, Quezon City.

The regime that started off on a high note of social consensus is now being threatened by creeping polarization. This is due in part to an abrasive yet popular style of leadership that's unforgiving to opposition and bearing streaks of Marcosian authoritarianism. Underlying such polarization is the continuing high inequality that allows a tiny group of 16 billionaire-families and their political allies across the political spectrum—accounting for less than 1 percent of the population--so much power and wealth at the expense of so many.

No less than a consensus around a national development strategy founded on inclusive, green agro-industrialization at the regional level with strong local institutions committed to provide basic economic and social services to the poorest will leave no one behind.

Social Watch has made its statement on how the Philippines could finally end poverty and achieve sustainable development through its Spotlight Report three years ago. We wanted to change everything—from a proposed vision of prosperity without growth, to changing the strategy and indicators. We know it's not easy.

What we want to see in our assessments and proposals in this CSO consultation is how much of our recommendations have been addressed and how much incremental improvements have been achieved. Many good things are happening within society as a whole. But we really need to engage government more not only to make a “whole government approach” but a “whole of society approach” to work towards bringing us closer to our dream of fairness in a fragile world.

## SDG 4

# Will equity in education be finally achieved?

Education Network Philippines

### Introduction

The three agencies comprising the Philippine's trifocalized education system, namely the Department of Education (DepEd), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) together with other education stakeholders from the private sector and civil society adopted Sustainable Development Goal 4 during the 2017 Education summit, as one of the guideposts for operationalizing the commitments for ensuring inclusive and quality education and stronger link of education and economic development.



Though slow in its roll-out, concerned government agencies were able to converge in 2018 to move towards the creation of a Multi-SectoralSDG4 Committee led by the three education agencies – DepEd for basic education, TESDA for TVET and CHED for tertiary education. This committee is a follow through of the National Education For All (EFA) Committee and is tasked to do coordination in the localization of SDGs. The first meeting was held in November 2018, convened by DepEd with the participation of Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), civil society (E-Net Philippines and ASPBAE), and other education and sectoral agencies. At its infancy period and yet to finalize terms of references and define memberships, the committee nevertheless included civil society that are now playing active roles. One progress is that the draft Terms of Reference makes Civil Society a permanent member. In November 2018, DepEd called for a Technical Working Group to formulate the Basic Education Master plan 2030 aligned with SDG4 where several CSOs were invited to participate including E-Net Philippines, ASPBAE, and Social Watch Philippines. In the same month, a NEDA-led National SDG Target Validation Workshop in preparation for the Philippines' Voluntary National Review Report (VNR), was held in Tagaytay City, a process opened to CSO participation. E-Net was the only CSO in the SDG4 cluster.



## **SDG4 Education 2030 Implementation: Progress, Issues and Challenges**

### ***On Financing***

Education has received the highest budget in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) since 2015. However, the total of the total education spending only falls around 2.7% to 3% of the GDP which is still way below the UNESCO Delors benchmark which is 6% of the GDP. The budget for education shows an increasing trend in the past ten years in nominal terms, but remains almost the same in real terms. In 2017, the Department of Education recorded one of the highest budget utilization rates among all government agencies, which is positive signal for increased efficiency and fiscal management.

However, equitable financing remains a big concern. The programs for education of indigenous people, persons with disabilities, Muslims, and out-of-school children and youth remain severely under-resourced and only account for less than 1% of the education budget.

On financing for tertiary education, the free education law only served a small %age of the poor populations as 88 % of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the Philippines are privately owned. The share of private sector enrollments in the Philippines is high by international standards, with only 45.8 % of the country's 3.5 million tertiary students were enrolled in public institutions in the 2016-17 academic year.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of increasing and allocating more funds to address essential education inputs and to further strengthen the public education system in providing education for more learners, especially the marginalized, a big amount of funds have been allocated in support for private education through the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private (GASTPE) program. The GASTPE program aims to provide financial assistance for private junior high school learners and teachers through the Educational Service Contracting scheme and Teachers' Salary Subsidy Fund, and for Senior High School students in non-DepEd schools through the Senior High School Voucher Program. For FYs 2012-2017, government has allocated P86 billion for GASTPE alone. This, despite studies by the World Bank, revealing that ESC has not been able to reach out to the poorest sections of the population as envisioned by the program.<sup>2</sup>

### ***On Inclusive Education***

To date, there is still no national law on Inclusive Education that will ensure the operationalization of "inclusive, equitable and quality education for all." Another challenge is the lack of data, especially on vulnerable and marginalized groups, in terms of their real numbers and specific requirements for education – this includes persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, Muslims, children and youth in armed-conflict and disaster situations and even those displaced by irresponsible "development" projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Macha, Wilson et. al. (2018), Education in the Philippines, World Education Network Reviews. Accessed: <https://wenr.wes.org/2018/03/education-in-the-philippines>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank (2011), Philippines Private Provision, Public Purpose: A Review of the Government's Education Service Contracting Program, The World Bank <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/27406/611540WP0P10651e0Govt1s0ESCOPProgram.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

The Philippine government made modest efforts to ensure the inclusion of everyone in education by addressing the issues on out-of-school youth. These are largely done through the Alternative Delivery Modes (ADMs) and the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The number of ALS learners that are being reached by the program increased from 537,666 in 2016 to 641,584 in 2017. However, this covers only 10% of the 6.6 million potential ALS enrollees aged 15 to 30.<sup>3</sup> The program has serious backlogs, hampered by weak institutionalization and underfunding.

In 2016, UNICEF estimated that there were about 3.3 million children with disabilities in the Philippines and only less than 3% had access to education. Enrollment in special education (SPED) is predominantly for fast learners/gifted, and not children with disabilities. The SPED program budget is not included among the priority budget items in education; instead it is included in each school's monthly overhead and operating expenses, marginalizing the sector even further.

Muslim and IP learners face issues like lack of access to school. For the Bangsamoro region alone, the number and accessibility of schools are at critical levels. There are also other issues like insensitivity of the school curriculum, lack of learning materials, low capacity of teachers to deliver Indigenous People and Muslim education.

Safety and protection in schools are a major issue for it affects the growth and learning of the children. A study on violence against children by the Council for the Welfare of Children shows that 80% (13-24 yrs. old) experienced violence, with high prevalence in males (81.5%) than females (78.4%); 59.2% experiencing physiological violence; 65% experiencing bullying; 43.8% experiencing cyber bullying; Three in five respondents or (66.3%) have been experiencing physical punishment since childhood and 60 % of these occurred mostly at home settings; and three out of five children have been verbally abused, threatened, and/or abandoned by their parents or guardians.<sup>4</sup>

The school is supposed to be the next institution after the home that ensures child safety and protection. However, despite the presence of a Child Protection Policy, school child protection mechanisms remain weak.

### ***On Equity***

The improvement in the completion and survival rate of students in primary and secondary levels can be partly attributed to the recent education reforms through the Kindergarten Act and K-to12. While the number of dropouts is decreasing, there are still millions of out-of-school youth in the country. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority's (PSA's) Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) of 2017, 3.6 million Filipinos with age range of 6-24 years old are out of school. The proportion of out-of-school children and youth (OSCYs) was higher

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2018), The Philippines Alternative Learning System: A Second Chance to Develop the Human Capital of Out-of-School Youth and Adults, The Worldbank Group. Accessed: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/publication/the-philippines-alternative-learning-system-a-second-chance-to-develop-the-human-capital-of-out-of-school-youth-and-adults>

<sup>4</sup> Council for the Welfare of the Children (2016), National Baseline Study on Violence against Children: Philippines, Council for the Welfare of the Children and UNICEF Philippines. <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/media/491/file>

among females (63.3%) than males (36.7%). The most common reasons among OSCYs for not attending school were marriage or family matters (37.0%), lack of personal interest (24.7%), and high cost of education or financial concern (17.9%), Employment (8.4%), Illness or disabilities (7.8%). Among females OSCYs, marriage or family matters (57.0%) was the main reason for not attending school while lack of personal interest among males (43.8%).<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, primary and secondary education performances vary in general according to the socio-economic classes they belong to and their region's development condition. While 81% of eligible children from the wealthiest 20% of households attended high school in 2013, only 53% of children from the poorest 20% of households did the same.<sup>6</sup> There is a huge gap between the performance of children in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the rest of the other regions in the country. ARMM is recorded as having the worst performance in its completion and cohort survival rates, and with the highest school leaver's rate.

There is significant progress in the skills development and access to tertiary education of the youth through the full implementation of the Enhanced Education Act of 2013 (RA 10533) and the Universal Access to Tertiary Quality Education and Skills Development. The number of senior high school (SHS) enrollees in 2018-2019 reached about 2.8 million and out of these, 63.3% were enrolled in the Academic Track, 36.1% in the TVL track and only less than 1% in the Arts and Designs, or Sports Track. The number of SHS graduates in 2018 numbered more than 1.2 million. However, assessments have shown that graduates of SHS still do not have the required skills for the job, and employers are not ready to employ Kto12 graduates.<sup>7</sup>

On tertiary education, the government data shows that the number of student enrollees in higher education has increased in recent years, growing from 2.2 million in 1999 to 4.1 million in SY 2015-16 and 3.5 million in SY 2016-17. When the government passed the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (UAQTEA) in 2017, it was expected to boost enrollments, especially those from low-income households. However, even if tuition fees are now free in the public higher education institutions, they are mostly serving rich and middle-income families. Only 12% of these SUCs' student populations are from poor families. Data also shows that the increasing number of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) is not correlated with either increase in enrolment in higher education nor with enrolment of students from poor households.<sup>8</sup>

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) was strengthened through Republic Act 10410 or the Early Years Act of 2013. While there is significant progress in terms of the institutionalization and coverage of ECCD in the country through this law, there are still remaining concerns with regard to weak or poor implementation of this policy. The government has no data in terms of the performance of public and private ECCD in the country along with the budget expenditure in this sector. In addition, there is poor stakeholder

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<sup>5</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority (2017), Annual Poverty Indicators Survey

<sup>6</sup> Oxford Business Group (2019), Education Reform in the Philippines aims for Better Quality and more Access, Oxford Business Group <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/thorough-examination-substantial-reform-has-brought-it-variety-challenges>

<sup>7</sup> Malipot, Merlina (2018), DepEd expects around 28-M learners to troop back to school for SY 2018-2019, Manila Bulletin <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/05/19/deped-expects-around-28-m-learners-to-troop-back-to-school-for-sy-2018-2019/>

<sup>8</sup> Orbeta, Aniceto C. and Paqueo, Vicente (2017), Who benefits and loses from an untargeted tuition subsidy for students in SUCs?, Philippine Institute for Development Studies <https://dirp4.pids.gov.ph/websitcms/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1703.pdf>

involvement especially among local government units, as well as weak coordination in the communities.

### ***On Quality Education***

Another critical issue is the declining educational quality in the Philippine education system as reflected by the outcomes of different assessment tests. One is the National Achievement Test (NAT) which measures student performance in the core subjects - Math, Science and Languages (Filipino and English). In schoolyear 2016-2017, Grade 6 students obtained low NAT scores of 40% average while Grade 10 students achieved only 44.1%. This performance was slightly lower than the 41.5% and 44.7% averages, respectively, in the previous 2015-2016 school year.<sup>9</sup>

The quality of learning is also very much affected by the quality of teaching. According to the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), only 20% of those seeking positions as elementary school teachers passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) in 2017; 22% in 2018; and 25.29% 2019. There is a need for the government to provide more support in the professionalization of teachers and address the shortage of qualified in the country. On a broader perspective, it can be observed that the purpose of education, as reflected in its program and curriculum, is mainly market-oriented, responding more to economic exigencies rather taking a more holistic approach. The present curriculum fails to provide a sense of history to students, reduces the teaching time for and marginalizes subjects that would have fostered more critical thinking and instilled historical and social awareness, such as Social Studies, History and even the Filipino language, which was taken out of the tertiary education curriculum. Teachers and school administrators themselves have a low level of awareness and competency to promote and teach on transformative education, human rights, sustainable development, and global citizenship. All these contribute to crucial knowledge and awareness-raising in order to transform our education system into one that is emancipatory not only for the learners but for entire society as well.

### ***Conclusion and Recommendations***

While there are efforts and initiatives underway to implement the SDGs and SDG 4 in the country, there is still a pressing need for the government to formulate a clear country architecture and coordination mechanism for the effective implementation of the SDGs. focusing on concrete action plans, increasing the funding and resources, reforming relevant policies, as well as improving institutional coordination.

People's participation, especially the youth and the academe, are still limited in the advancement of policies for SDG4. The CSO recommendations for the set of indicators deemed important were mostly parked at tier 2 and 3, meaning less priority given, purportedly because of lack of existing data gathering methodologies. Youth, academe and CSOs play significant roles in all stages of education. These actors can influence policy development and programme design,

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<sup>9</sup> Aguinaldo, Camille A. (2019), K to 12 review finds declining test scores, skills mismatch, Business World. [https://www.bworldonline.com/k-to-12-review-finds-declining-test-scores-skills-mismatch-in SUCs?](https://www.bworldonline.com/k-to-12-review-finds-declining-test-scores-skills-mismatch-in-SUCs/), Philippine Institute for Development Studies <https://dirp4.pids.gov.ph/websitcems/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1703.pdf>

contribute to narrowing persistent gaps in educational outcomes, as well as transform the education system into one that is inclusive, equitable, and of good quality. Hence, it is crucial to open up broader spaces and start meaningful dialogue with young people, teachers and education personnel, and the civil society.

The report then recommends to:

- Take the necessary measures to achieve all SDG 4 targets and not only what is being traditionally measured;
- Improve data collection and analysis to effectively monitor the progress on the SDGs, particularly SDG 4;
- Substantially increase the national education budgets to achieve the SDG 4 targets and source additional funds, for example by expanding the tax base and ensuring corporations contribute their fair share of taxes;
- Use a pro-poor approach and link education and training for decent work at the local level for relevant job opportunities;
- Education Agencies (ECCD Council, DepEd, TESDA, CHED) should formulate education policies on the provision of education for children and youth with disabilities and prepare a national plan with concrete action plans that set out the details of the strategies to address particular contexts, characteristics and needs of children and youth with disabilities and provide the needed modifications and specific learning requirements;
- Strengthen regulation of private schools to ensure non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, respect for the right to education, and compliance to national standards and obligations;
- Ensure safety and protection of learners by strengthening child protection mechanisms at school and community levels.
- Develop and strengthen programmes and pathways to learning opportunities for the marginalized, excluded, and vulnerable (MEV) groups, especially the rural youth, girls and women, children with disabilities, indigenous groups, among many others; and
- Ensure the quality of pre-service teacher education and availability of teacher training programmes to educate and improve teachers and other educational personnel, to render them well-equipped in responding to students' learning needs.

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## SDG 8 AND 10

# Growth, Labor Productivity and Decent Work: What Needs to Happen to Reduce Poverty and Inequality in the Philippines?

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To state that the country's main problem is poverty would be to ignore the other half of the development equation; that is, that some of the richest Filipinos and their families are ensconced in the Forbes dollar-denominated list of global billionaires. Policymakers, academics and even some CSO members openly worry about poverty but the problem of glaring inequalities in the country generally remains unproblematized. There is, as is often the case, a sense that for as long as poverty is reduced, 'then there should be no principled objection to the unrestricted gains of the very rich' (UNRISD 2010, p.59). The argument runs thus: cultivating wealth is beneficial as it 'generates savings, investment and growth', the gains of which will trickle down and uplift the poor (ibid). The Philippines, with its great economic disparities, is testament to the fallacy of this reasoning, an observation which UNRISD (ibid) further asserts, citing other examples of the existence of high income and wealth inequalities among the poorest countries.

Apart from certain policy statements to undertake agrarian reform and eliminating other disparities like gender and other dimensions of inequality, addressing this issue with decisive action, including serious redistributive reforms, seems a marginal concern across the country's medium-term development plans across the last three decades, in spite widespread evidence of dramatically unequal distribution of income and wealth<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Income is money received on a regular basis usually due to work while wealth is the net worth of a person which takes into account the total value of his assets minus his liabilities (also referred to as 'passive income')

**8** DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



**10** REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES





among Filipinos. This type of inequality is referred to as vertical inequality, while horizontal inequalities often speak to inequalities among groups due to other dimensions such as ethnicity, (dis)ability, gender, age, location, sexual orientation. These inequalities, both vertical and horizontal, intersect, compound and complicate the reality of oppression and exploitation of subaltern groups.

It was only under the Duterte Administration that inequality-reducing measures were identified as a major strategic outcome or pillar in the country's five-year development plan. Along this line, strategies were outlined to expand economic opportunities in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries (AFF) sector—create more jobs and businesses in the industry and services (I&S) sector; accelerate human capital development by reducing vulnerability of individuals and families and to build safe and secure communities (National Economic Development Authority, Philippine Development Plan: 2017-2022 Abridged version; 2017; pages 12, 19-28). While government has undertaken certain measures such as increased funding for human development with free tertiary education as a prime example, as subsequent sections will underscore, the desire to reduce inequality is generally not matched by adequate political action. More than that, other policy measures are seen to deepen poverty and inequality such as the imposition of a fuel tax as embedded in the recently enacted tax law pointing to policy incoherence in the fight against poverty and inequality.

## **Why Inequality Matters**

There is no overstating the urgency of addressing the issue of inequality in the country. There are ethical and developmental reasons on why a focus on inequality is critical.

## **On Vertical Inequality**

Inequality undermines peoples' human rights across various dimensions—economic, social and political (UNRISD 2010, page 6). Furthermore, high levels of inequality (which is usually a Gini coefficient of more than 0.4) negatively impacts on economic and social well-being (UNRISD 2010, pp. 61-62). Apart from a normative basis, UNRISD (ibid) outlines the following reasons as to why inequality matters. These are the following reasons:

'One, higher levels of inequality make it harder to reduce poverty through growth. With high levels of inequality, growth tends to be concentrated in certain sectors, with those who are not linked to these growth sectors being excluded from the benefits. Such exclusion in turn, lowers the potential for growth, particularly in a context of poverty by constraining the productive capacity of the poor and thus their potential contribution to growth. Under such circumstances, a large proportion of the workforce (the poor) have limited productive capacities for reasons that include inadequate nutrition and ill-health, low levels of education or skills, a lack of employment opportunities or limited access to productive assets such as land or credit. Furthermore, the economic exclusion of a significant proportion of the population contributes to their social and political exclusion through processes of disempowerment and lack of recognition or representation;

Second, higher levels of inequality can also retard growth by translating into lower effective aggregate demand in the economy. In highly unequal societies, the poor are more likely to

be locked into a subsistence economy and have limited disposable income for the purchase of manufactured goods. This limits the size of the domestic market and hinders the potential for (*agro-inclusion mine*)—industrialization that is an important driver of growth;

Third, high levels of inequality have negative implications for the building of inclusive states that have the capacity to implement redistributive and progressive economic and social policies. High levels of inequality may also undermine the realization of civil, political, economic and social rights, and the exercise of substantive citizenship. Inequality is often a factor in rising levels of crime and social unrest... In extreme cases, especially where inequality is manifested along ethnic lines, it can lead to war and the failure of the state.

Fourth, without deliberate policy interventions, high levels of inequality tend to be self-perpetuating. They lead to the development of political and economic institutions that work to maintain the political, economic and social privilege of the elite. In highly unequal societies, the poor have little influence; in the absence of meaningful representation to change underlying structures that perpetuate inequalities, they may become locked into poverty traps from which it is difficult to escape;

Finally, even under conditions of rapid growth, inequality is likely to be reinforced by the distribution of the externalities of growth. For example, the poor are most likely to bear the burden of environmental degradation arising from rapid industrialization. Only when the fruits of growth and distributed equitably—either directly as income or socially through the provision of infrastructure and other public goods—is the statistical fact of a rising gross domestic product (GDP) experienced as an improvement in overall living conditions and well-being.'

## On Horizontal Inequality

The Philippine population is composed not only of socio-economic classes but of a number of groupings on account of ethnicity, regions, religions as well as those based on age, abilities, sexual orientation and the like.

Growth and development do not impact all classes and groups in the same way, level and intensity. To paraphrase UNRISD (2010, p. 81), when the benefits and costs of development 'correspond to ethnic or religious affinities or geographic location,' or other dimensions, 'individuals may perceive development in terms of those cleavages.... and such inequalities can be a source of conflict and adversely affect well-being...'

As UNRISD (*ibid*) further observes, 'group inequalities are closely linked to the ways in which groups are integrated into different sectors of the economy, as well as their representation in political and social institutions. They are also reflected in how identities are valued in the cultural sphere. Such inequalities are therefore multidimensional and encompass economic, social, cultural and political dimensions.' Achieving horizontal or inter-group equality is not only ethically imperative as it promotes the rights of all people, it is also a vital element to the reduction of poverty. As UNRISD (*ibid*) outlines, addressing horizontal inequalities address the following:

'First, between-group inequalities make up a large component of overall inequality within any country. A focus on only vertical inequality may obscure important differences among groups or regions. Some groups may be seriously disadvantaged or have higher than average concentrations of poverty even when overall vertical inequality is low;

Second, regional inequalities in large industrializing countries, as well as in most developing and transition economies, appears to be on the rise. If ethnic groups are geographically clustered, *industrialization or development may bypass groups that are not located in economically dynamic zones, intensifying poverty in the neglected areas* (italics mine);

Third, inequalities between ethnic groups can lead to conflict, which is likely to affect development. Indeed, most conflicts today tend to have an ethnic dimension and are difficult to resolve;

Fourth, horizontal or between-group inequalities are significant because, in some situations, it may not be possible to improve the position of individuals without tackling the position of the group....

Groups that start from a position of privilege may forge ahead, while those that have historically been disadvantaged may fall into a vicious cycle, or a relative poverty trap. Breaking through these cycles of wealth accumulation will be crucial to tackling poverty among disadvantaged groups. '

In this regard, deliberate redistributive policies and affirmative action (which includes targeting both ends of the of the distribution curve of the poor and socially excluded group) are critical (UNRISD 2010, p. 82). So too are regional development strategies which tend to address regional disparities (ibid). Furthermore, the politics of inclusion and political will is crucial in addressing horizontal inequalities (ibid).

For example, in the case of children, 'inequalities are finally reduced when there is both equity and equality and that all children have the same quality of food, education and access to facilities they need. Nevertheless, there are still many children experiencing poverty and cruelty as well as discrimination between the rich and the poor' (Save the Children, Highlights of the Children's Consultation on the SDGs, 2019).

In the case of Persons with Disabilities:

"people with disabilities experience inequality—for example when people with disabilities are denied equal access to health care, employment, education or political participation because of their disability" (the World Bank (WB) as cited in the 2011 World Health Organization's (WHO) World Report on Disability).

In addition, persons with disabilities, due of the nature of impairment, age, gender, geographical location, socio-economic and cultural background experience significant levels of discrimination and exclusion (UNCRPD, 2006). There is wide recognition that progress has not been equitable and that persons with disabilities are disproportionately represented among those left behind by recent development gains (ibid). Without a concerted effort to highlight and protect citizens with disabilities, inequalities will endure (ibid)

The key challenge that have the greatest impact on Persons with Disabilities sector is discrimination which is present in the workplace, community and even in technology (UNCRPD, 2006). The level and type of inequality can vary depending on the sectors and types of disability experienced (ibid).

### Not just the level, but the quality and source, of growth matter for development



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority: Quarterly National Accounts

Growth rates in the country have dramatically fluctuated since 1998 to 2019(see Chart 1).The average growth rates in the first decade of 2000 is 4.8 percent. Since then, the country has been averaging over 6 percent growth rates, which has cemented its reputation as among the best performing economies in Asia and the world.

On the face of it, the country's growth rates are impressive. What has largely been invisible in the official narrative is that the impressive growth rates is significantly driven by household consumption fueled by large-scale remittance inflows from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to the tune of US\$25 to 30 million a year. These OFWs comprise about eleven percent of the population (1) Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos: As of December 2013; Commission of Filipino Overseas; ; <http://www.cfo.gov.ph/images/stories/pdf/StockEstimate2013.pdf> 2) McKenzie; *The Unlucky Country: The Republic of the Philippines in the 21St Century*; page 138)

For example,they are the domestic helpers and caregivers, lovingly caring for children and grandparents in other countries, while their own children grow up, and their parents grow old, in their absence. They are the seamen who competently man foreign vessels that travel to the farthest destinations. They are the doctors and nurses who providehealthcarein hospitals overseas, while countless health clinics in their own country have none. They are OFW Filipinaswho often endure loneliness and the pain of separation from their spouses and children, and are oftentimes the victims of violence and sexual abuse.

Migration is a wonderful thing when resorted to voluntarily, happily. But when migration occurs, in order to improve living standards so that kith and kin may eat three times a day, allow children to finish schooling, and afford quality (oftentimes private) healthcare, because of a dearth of decent work<sup>2</sup> in one's own country, then the growth rates fueled by it are no longer impressive; it rings hollow. To put it bluntly, we have become a nation dependent on sending its people to work in other countries to keep its coffers full and keep bodies and souls of Filipino families together. For as long as the country's growth rates remain significantly bloated due to the 'forced migration' of Filipinos working abroad, then GDP levels cannot, should not, be an indicator of development. In this regard, the 'source' of growth matters in determining the 'quality' of development. Apart from OFW remittances, other major sources of growth are the business processing output (BPO) industry (call centers) and exports, much of which are semi-conductors (a phenomenon that has not progressed since the Marcos era).

On the other hand, the reality of Filipino families largely subsidized by foreign-denominated currencies converted into pesos, thanks to an OFW relative, has translated into the emergence of a growing middle-class with money to burn; consequently, oligarchic corporate networks have 'followed the money,' so to speak, by providing services such as in real estate, construction of malls, houses and condominiums, rentals and other economic activities that generally cater to this recently risen demographic, further cementing the observation that the Philippines is a consumption-driven economy (rather than investment-driven). Those invested in these economic activities are mostly found in the services sector and it is they who are among those who have benefitted the most from the high growth rates. They are those who have consistently made its way into the annual Forbes list of dollar billionaires, dropping or rising in the rankings, but are generally included, as well as their confreres. Chart 2 is the Forbes list of Top Ten Richest for the Philippines for 2019.

Chart 2: Forbes' list for top ten richest in the Philippines 2019



Source: Business World; <https://www.bworldonline.com/villar-leads-other-philippine-billionaires-on-forbes-richest-list/>

<sup>2</sup> According to the International Labor Organization, decent work refers to productive work which has the following characteristics: a fair income, job security, social protection for workers and their families, space for personal development and freedom to express views, organize and participate decisions that affect workers and gender



A look at their profile will show that their wealth mostly comes from real estate, construction, banking and financial intermediaries, port operation, integrated gaming resort operation, tobacco, food, beverage and power. These individuals and their companies are embedded in the growth sectors, and is a source of their great wealth.

Manuel Villar is the chairman of Starmalls and Vista & Landscapes, one of the largest mall operators and largest homebuilder in the Philippines respectively. John Gokongwei is the founder of JG Summit whose interests span air transportation, telecommunications, banking, food, power and property. A particular example is the Universal Robina Corporation which is one of the largest food and beverage companies in the country. Meanwhile, Enrique Razon chairs the International Container Terminal Services (ICTSI), the Philippines' leading terminal operator and the Bloomberry Resorts Co., a hospitality company featuring the Solaire Casino and Resort in Manila. Lucio Tan is the founder and chairman of the LT group which ventures in tobacco, spirits, banking and property development. An example is Asia brewery - first established by Tan, now a subsidiary of LT group and the only one to compete with market leader San Miguel. Tony Caktiong is the founder and Chairman of Jollibee Food, one of the world's fastest-growing Asian restaurant chains and which sells quick-serve and affordable Filipino, Chinese, American and European dishes. Ramon Ang is the President and vice Chairman of San Miguel, one of the country's oldest conglomerates and now a leader in food and beverages but also undertaking power and infrastructure business efforts. Andrew Tan chairs Alliance Global, a holding company venturing in food and beverage, gaming and real estate. It owns the nation's McDonald Franchise and listed brandy company Emperador. Ending the top ten list are the six children of former SM magnate Henry Sy, now deceased. All Sy siblings in the top 10 richest list for 2019 either as advisors, directors, executive director, Co-Vice Chairman and Chairmen of SM Investments Corp (SMIC) or its property arm SM Prime Holdings and BDO Unibank. ( ( 1) ArraFrancia, Villar leads other Philippine billionaires on Forbes' richest list, <https://www.bworldonline.com/villar-leads-other-philippine-billionaires-on-forbes-richest-list/> ; 2) Forbes, Philippines' 50 richest: 2018 Ranking, <https://www.forbes.com/philippines-billionaires/list/#tab:overall> )

Excluded and de-linked from the growth bonanza are those in the agricultural sector, especially farmers and fisherfolk who remain in hand-to-mouth existence, and comprise the poorest section of the country's labor force (Philippine Statistics Authority; Selected Statistics on Agriculture 2018, p.5; <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Selected%20Statistics%20on%20Agriculture%202018.pdf>)

As mentioned earlier, high levels of inequality means that only certain sectors benefit from the dynamic growth zones, while others, particularly farmers, fisherfolk, and others in the low-value sectors of the economy, by virtue of their exclusion, continue to languish in their low-productivity, subsistence production poverty trap, thereby intensifying vertical inequality.

It has been noted by ILO (2017, p. 32) that 'job-slow' growth has been observed in the last 15 years. For example, in agriculture, very low growth rates resulted in negative employment; in industry, strong growth had a 'marginal employment effect' (it was 'higher in the more labor-intensive sub-sectors of mining and quarrying and construction, and lower in the more capital intensive sub-sectors that require specific skills like manufacturing and utilities—electricity, gas and water supply' (ibid). ILO (ibid) further observes that even in services which posted

relatively better growth rates, marginal employment is noted. Interestingly, it was only in the areas of public administration, defense, hotels and restaurants did employment grow higher than GDP, and that government's temporary employment programs helped boost employment growth (ibid).

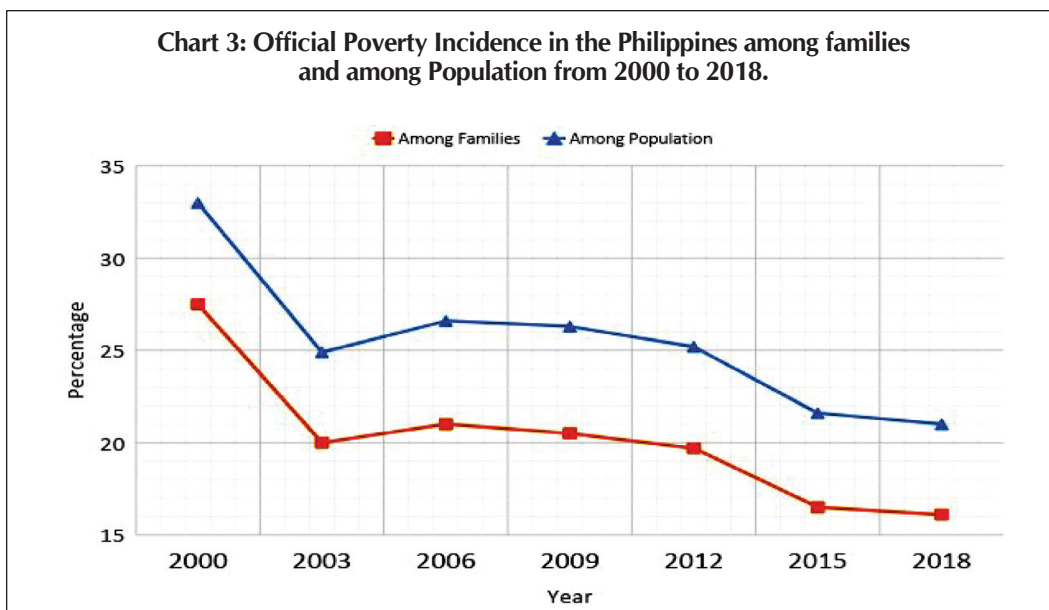
While proponents of degrowth (which means the reduction of aggregate economic activities in a country) believe that this is feasible for modern and affluent societies as their quality of life can be maintained, if not improved (Hickel 2019, p.54), this is not the case in developing countries like the Philippines where low growth rates are associated with a lack of jobs and quality employment, and the consequent high levels of poverty. Countries like the Philippines still rely on increased levels of growth, including labor productivity, in order to boost the number and quality of jobs needed to improve standards of living. According to ILO (ibid), to improve employment, higher levels of GDP is needed. This means that at the country's current stage of development, the level and quality of growth matter, that is, significantly increase productivity growth across all sectors as well as growth in the dynamic sectors to generate quality jobs. As importantly, the gains of growth needs to be equitably distributed so that those bypassed from the growth centers also benefit. This can be done through deliberate State action in the realm of redistributive measures and affirmative action.

### **Official and Self-Rated Poverty and Hunger**

Official poverty in the country has purportedly decreased from 25.6 percent in 2012, to 21.6 percent as recorded by end-2015. The questions raised by this author then, following the public announcement of the end-2015 poverty rates were two-fold: one, how does government explain the poverty reduction which only occurred in the second semester of 2015 (prior to that, poverty incidence generally remained the same at around 26 percent from 2006 until the first semester of 2015 or a period of 14 and a half years) and two, whether the decline in the poverty incidence could be maintained, if not lowered, in subsequent years.

The PSA in early 2019 released the 2018 first semester survey results which showed that poverty incidence stood at 21 percent. Then they proceeded to compare this result with the poverty data in the first semester of 2015 (which stood at 27.6 percent) and, on this basis, publicly declared that poverty incidence had declined. However, if they had compared first semester poverty incidence in 2018 to end-2015 levels (which would have been the more logical thing to do), then one reaches a very different conclusion, that is, that poverty incidence generally remained unchanged. Chart 3 basically show that poverty incidence in 2015 and the first semester of 2018 has generally remained unchanged. Put differently, official poverty incidence remains unchanged in the last three years, under the Duterte Administration.





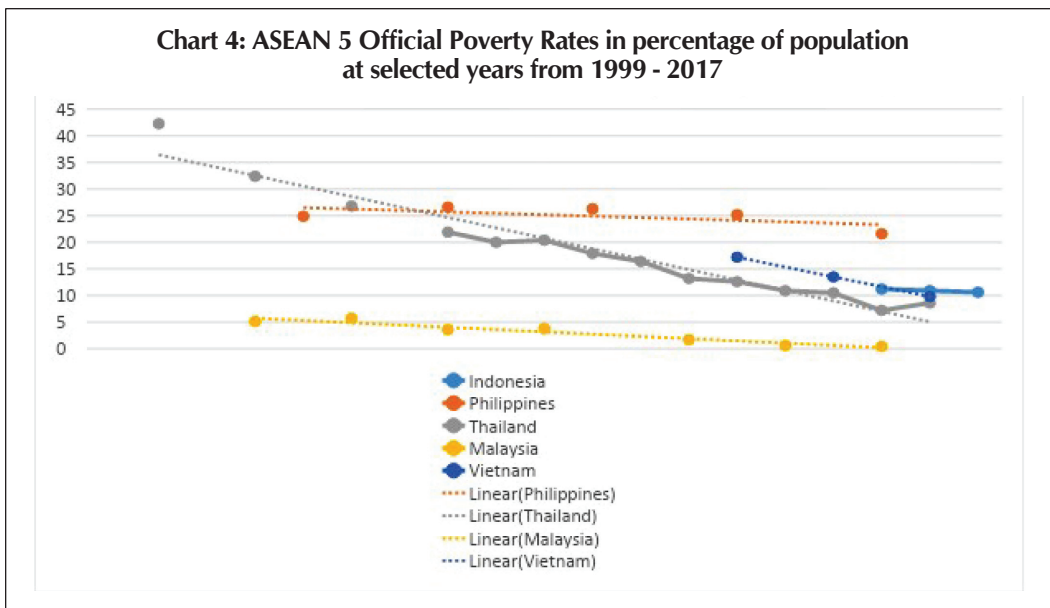
Note: The 2018 percentages are First Semester Poverty incidence percentages only.

Source: National Statistics Offices: Family Income and Expenditure Survey 2000 and 2003; Philippine Statistics Authority: 2015 Official Poverty Statistics of the Philippines; Philippine Statistics Authority: <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/nid/138411>

Furthermore, the spatial dimensions of poverty are worrying; the first semester 2018 data show that poverty worsened in the last three years for more cities and provinces compared to those that improved. As alarmingly, the same data set shows that poverty among the poorest provinces worsened such as in Basilan, Isabela City and Tawi-Tawi.

It is worth noting that in spite the decline in the country's poverty incidence to 21 percent in 2015, and which generally remains unchanged to this day, the country's poverty level remains the highest among the ASEAN-5.<sup>3</sup> See Chart 4. As such, it is disturbing that in the government's Voluntary National Review (VNR), an extrapolation estimate show that, assuming the recent rate of poverty reduction remains the same, the Philippines will only reduce its poverty incidence to 15.8 percent by 2030 (VNR draft, 2019, p. 72)! Such a trajectory will keep the country a laggard in poverty status among the ASEAN-5. This also goes against the government's own goal of reducing poverty to 14 percent by 2022. This means that for the government to reach its target, it must deliberately employ certain policies and programs to accelerate poverty reduction in the country.

<sup>3</sup> The ASEAN-5 refers to the original members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) set up in Bangkok in 08 August 1967. These are Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999.

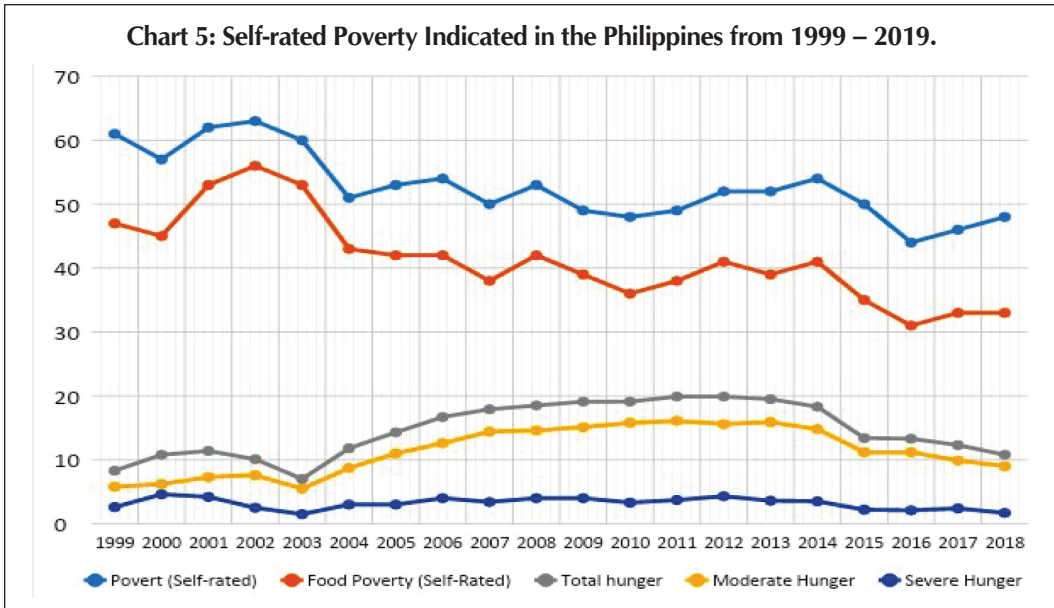


Source: World Bank: Global Poverty Working Group

People’s perception of poverty and hunger however tells a different story; they tend to be more optimistic about their situation (see Chart 5). From 2004 until 2015 (or a span of more than ten years), self-rated poverty hovered along the 50 percent line, or double that of the official poverty threshold. However, for the first time, self-rated poverty level plummeted to 44 percent in 2016, and then began to rise: in 2017, it stood at 46 percent, and in 2018, it further rose to 48 percent. This means that Filipinos generally perceive poverty levels to have improved under the Duterte Administration, a perception further reinforced when self-rated poverty plummeted to a record-low of 38 percent for the first quarter of 2019.

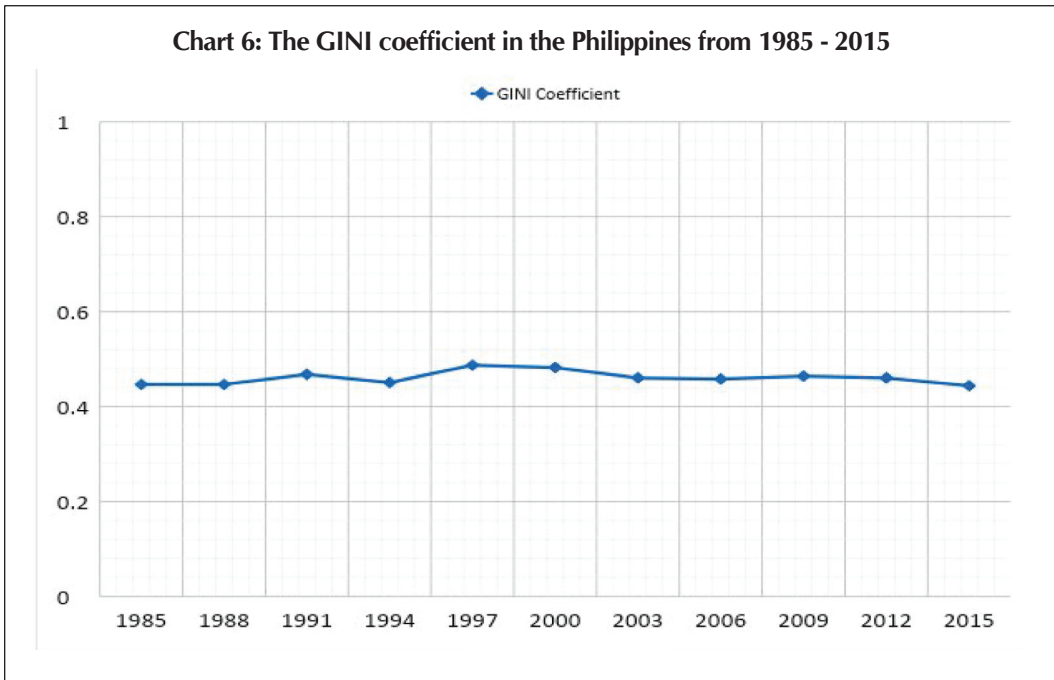
This is consistent with the SWS story of (self-rated) hunger. Chart 5 shows that hunger has steadily increased from 2004 (at 11.8 percent) to 19.5 percent in 2013, and then dramatically decreased to 13.4 percent in 2015. It generally remained the same in 2016 at 13.3 percent, then fell to 12.3 percent in 2017 and further declined to 10.8 percent in 2018. In the first of quarter of 2019, self-rated hunger further fell to 9.5 percent.

This paper argues that self-rated hunger is a more reliable measure than self-rated poverty as there is less conceptual ambiguity in people’s perception of hunger, as compared to poverty. For more on this read Maria Victoria Raquiza’s 2008 *Democratizing Poverty Discourse: The Case of the Social Weather Stations Self-Rated Survey on Poverty and Hunger*.



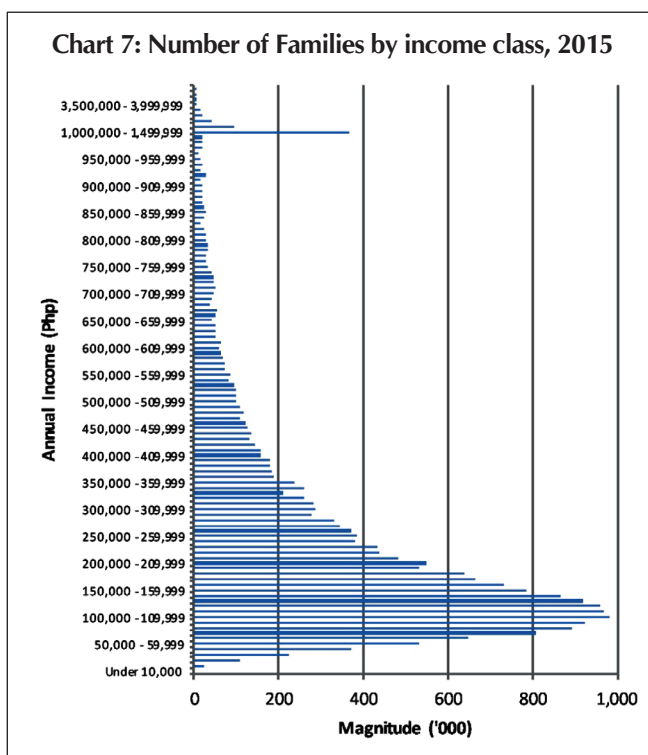
Source: Social Weather Station

On the other hand, the latest available data on the country’s income inequality is the 2015 Gini coefficient which stood at 0.44. While this is an improvement to the 0.46 of 2012, from a thirty year time frame, the country’s Gini has generally stayed within 0.44 to 0.46 range and has not broken free from this historical pattern. See Chart 6. Generally, the country’s inequality level has stayed high in the last thirty years, a pattern that has remained unbroken.



Source: Philippines Statistics Authority: 2017 Philippine Statistical Yearbook

The country's enduringly high poverty incidence gives the lie to the trickle-down theory of mainstream economics (or the 'rising tide lifts all boats' tenet). The high economic growth rates have generally benefitted those involved in the growth sectors of the economy while those de-linked from these sectors generally remain excluded from benefitting from the gains of growth and continue to languish in low-productive, low value work, especially in agriculture, industry, and a section in the services sector, thereby intensifying inequality.



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, Labor Force Survey

The distribution of the number of families by income class almost follows a unimodal shape significantly skewed towards the lower income classes with the PhP100 000 – 109 999 income class (or those earning PHP8 000 to PhP 9,167 monthly) possessing the largest number of families. Please note that PhP8,000 translates to PhP53 per person a day, which is below the official poverty line threshold. On the other hand, PhP9,167 translates to PhP 61 per person a day. Whether PhP53 or PhP61, these two amounts are still below the current poverty threshold which is PhP 10,481 for a family of five or PhP 69.87 per person a day (Philippine Statistics Authority, Proportion of Poor Filipinos registered at 21.0 percent in the First Semester of 2018, <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/nid/138411>)

The official poverty threshold at PhP 10, 481 for a family of five for a month or Php 69.87 per person a day has been roundly criticized by many civil society organizations and netizens as being too low. In a rare and candid admission by a government official, NEDA Secretary Ernesto Pernia publicly agreed in 2018 that the poverty threshold at Php 69.87 a person per day was indeed too low. He further claimed that more realistically, the poverty threshold should be pegged at PhP 42,000 per month for a family of five or PhP 504,000 a year for a family to enjoy

a decent standard of living.<sup>4</sup> Using this as a poverty threshold, this means at least 65 percent<sup>5</sup> of families are below the poverty line using data from 2015 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 8 Distribution of Families by Income Class, by Main Source of Income and by Region: 2015, <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/attachments/hsd/article/TABLE%20%20Distribution%20of%20Families%20by%20Income%20Class%2C%20by%20Main%20Source%20of%20Income%20and%20by%20Region%202015.pdf>) Going by this, the majority of Filipinos are poor.

## The Centrality of Employment and Decent Work

Employment represents the single most important source of income for the majority of the world's people (UNRISD 2010, p. 4), an observation which can very well apply to the Philippines. This means that if the country is to reduce, if not eradicate, poverty and improve its inequality rate, it must significantly improve its employment profile.

A country's economic structure is composed of the three sectors, namely, agriculture, services and industry (with manufacturing as an important sub-sector of industry). Each sector contributes to the economy in two ways: one, it contributes to the national output or to the GDP; and two, it contributes to employment. A country's economic structure provides the scaffolding or backbone of its employment structure. For example, if the country's economy has a vibrant and strong manufacturing sector, this means the demand for work in this sector is high, work that is characterized as relatively of higher-value or of higher- productivity.

The higher the labor productivity growth<sup>6</sup> of each sector, the higher the wages and the better the benefits such as social security received. This is why labor productivity growth is a 'good indicator of a country's ability to improve its standard of living over time' (Usui, 2012, p. 11). Jobs characterized by high levels of productivity are found in the formal (as against informal) sector.

Given all these, the most sustainable pathway out of poverty are to, one, increase labor productivity growth across all sectors of the economy; and two, move labor to the most dynamic sector, such as in manufacturing and the IT/knowledge-based economy. This process is also referred to as structural transformation. All these pertain to SDG goal 8, which includes the need to improve labor productivity and promote access to decent work.

This means poverty reduction cannot occur at a significant level or pace if the government resorts to simply providing low value, low productive work (the poor end up simply being part of the working poor population). Developmental ambition and political will is needed to get the poor out of poverty at an accelerated pace (and not the unambitious 'intergenerational'

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<sup>4</sup> Part of NEDA Secretary Pernia's assumption is that there are two family members earning Php21,000 each, which means they are exempted from paying income taxes.

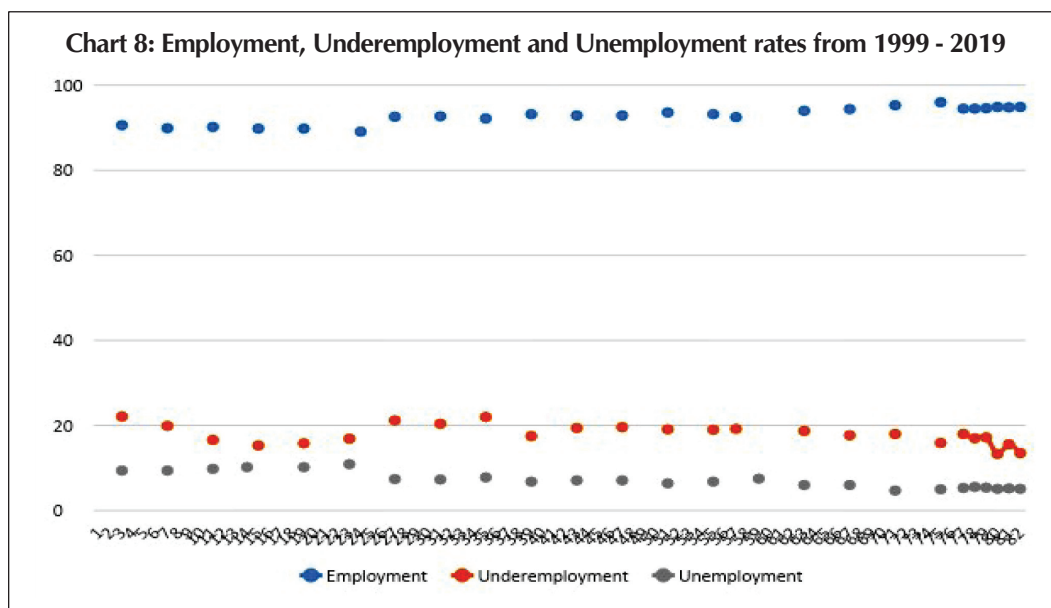
<sup>5</sup> Based on Table 8 Distribution of Families by Income Class, there are 22,730 thousand families in all income classes with 355 thousand, 901 thousand, 3,268 thousand, 10,318 thousand and 7,888 thousand for the Under 40,000, 40,000-59,999, 60,000-99,999, 100,000-249,000 and 250,000 onwards income classes respectively. To compute for an estimate of below the poverty threshold by Pernia which is Php 504,000, add the number of families belonging to the income class 100,000-249,000 and below (as they are below 504,000) and divide it with the total number of families. Mathematically this is  $355 + 901 + 3268 + 10318 + 7888 = 148422738 = 65.27\%$

<sup>6</sup> labor productivity growth measures the amount of good and services produced by one hour of labor (Usui, 2012)

reduction of poverty as is often mentioned by the policy elite and technocrats) and on a sustained basis<sup>7</sup>. Since providing decent work is central to combatting poverty and inequality, there is a need to further inquire into the status of Philippine employment today.

### Philippine Employment: The Quality of Work Matters for the Reduction of Poverty and Inequality

The chart below provides two decades of employment trends: From 1999 to 2003, employment hovered at 89 to 90 percent; In 2004, it steadily climbed from 89.1 in end-2004 to to 92.6 the 3rd quarter of 2005 and remained lodged there for over a decade. Employment further peaked to 95.3 percent in the third quarter of 2016 and then slipped to 94-95 percent in 2017-2018. In general terms, employment has steadily climbed across two decades, and reached its peak in 2016 at 95.3 percent; while the rate has slipped since then, it remains high at 94-95 percent at 2018. It is noteworthy that considered ‘employed’ are ‘persons in the labor force who are reported either as at work or with a job or business although not a work. Persons at work are those who did some work, even for an hour during the reference period’ (PSA, Technical Notes on the Labor Force Survey, <https://psa.gov.ph/article/technical-notes-labor-force-survey2012-08-16-1659>).



Source: Social Weather Station

<sup>7</sup> Note that many Asian neighbors, called the developmental states such as South Korea and Taiwan, who were poorer than the Philippines in the 1950s, managed to significantly reduce, if not eradicate, poverty within a generation.



It is important to note that while formal sector work is expanding, so has precarious work among those formally employed (ILO 2017, p.27). Precarious work is defined as ‘the result of employment practices by employers designed to limit or reduce their permanent workforce to a minimum, to maximize their flexibility, and to shift risks onto workers’ (ILO 2011, p.6). According to the ILO (2017, p.27) precarious work is witnessed

‘in the rise of non-standard or non-regular forms of employment ...defined as ‘short-term or seasonal or casual job’ including some form of fixed term or project employment contracts, seasonal employment, and employment through contracting or sub-contracting arrangements. .., precarious employment is popularly known locally as ‘contractualization,’ ‘endo,’ or ‘5-5-5’.

Precarious employment is seen as a serious threat to the rights of workers to security of tenure, labour standards, occupational safety and health, self-organization and collective bargaining, and social protection. Precarious workers are employed to fill permanent job needs but are denied permanent employee rights. Worldwide, permanent employment across a number of sectors has shifted to precarious jobs through outsourcing, use of employment agencies, and inappropriate classification of workers as “short-term” or “independent contractors.”

Precarious employment is monitored in terms of incidence, work stability and security, and workers’ income (In 2014, it was estimated that almost a million workers of the 4.47 million (22 per cent) directly employed in establishments (with 20 or more workers) were in precarious employment (Table 1). In addition, there were also 672,000 workers employed through contracting or subcontracting agencies with fixed term employment contracts. About 85 percent of those in precarious employment were in private establishments.’

**Table 1: Precarious Employments in Establishments, 2014 (in 000 except percent)**

Sector	Total employment	Precarious employment				
		Total	% of total employment	Casual	Seasonal	Contractual or Project-based
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 472</b>	<b>982</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>672</b>
Agriculture	239	97	40.6	10	56	32
Industry	1 335	347	26.0	87	22	238
Manufacturing	1 006	213	21.2	64	17	132
Services	2 898	538	18.6	111	25	403

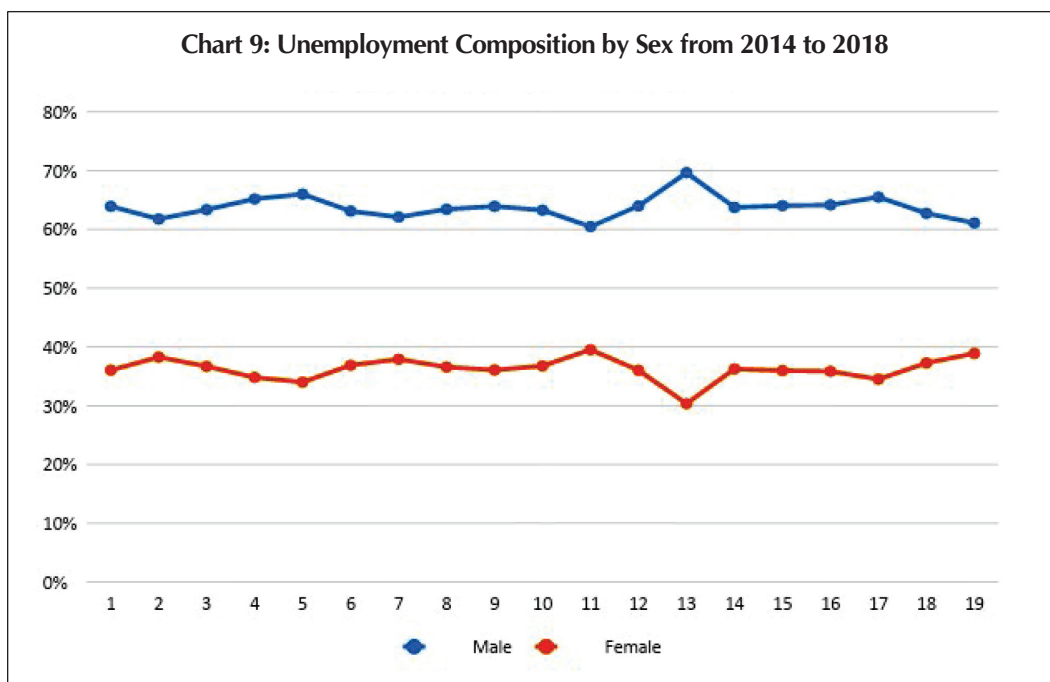
Source: PSA, Integrated Survey on Labor and Equipment

Across all establishments regardless of size, the Labor Force Survey (LFS) estimates that the number of employees in precarious employment almost doubled from 3.9 to 7 million between 2000 and 2015. It now accounts for over 30 per cent of total employees or wage and salary workers. In private establishments, about one-third of total employees were in precarious work.’



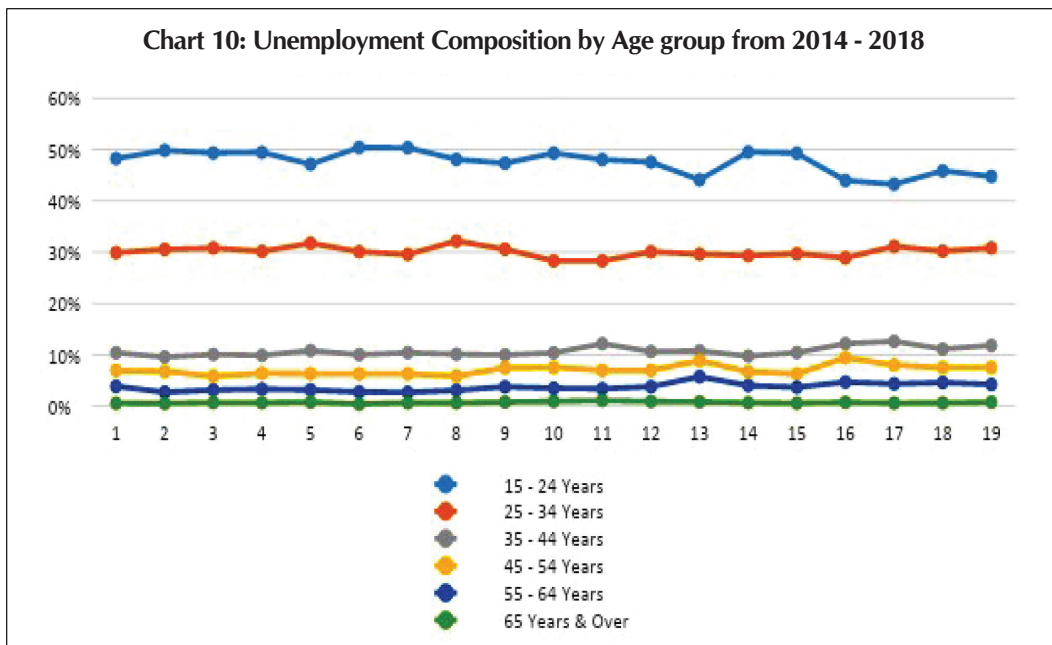
Unemployment levels hovered from 1999 to 2004 (or a span of five years) from 9 to 11 percent. In 2005, it significantly declined to 7 percent, also as a result in the change of definition of unemployment. The old definition of unemployed involved only two criteria namely, one, without work and are looking for work and two, without work and not looking for work due to valid reasons while the new definition of unemployed, used in 2005 onwards, employs three criteria which are, one, persons without work, two, persons currently available for work and three, persons seeking work or not seeking work because of the belief that no work is available, or awaiting results of previous job application, or because of temporary illness or disability, bad weather or waiting for rehire or job recall. (PSA, Technical Notes on the Labor Force Survey, <https://psa.gov.ph/article/technical-notes-labor-force-survey2012-08-16-1659>). Suffice it to say, unemployment levels immediately declined as a result in the change of definition.

Moreover, the unemployment rate steadied at 7 percent until 2012 until it fluctuated from 6 to 7.5 and then moved back to 6 percent from 2013-2014 period. Consistent with the employment trend, unemployment reached a record low of 4.7 percent In 2016, then climbed back up to 5.7 percent in 2017, and settled to 5.3 percent on average in 2018. In general terms, unemployment levels in the last two decades has steadily declined from a high of 11 percent in 1999 to a low of 5 percent in 2018. It has been noted that unemployment rates tend to be higher among those with tertiary and post-secondary education compared to those with less education (ILO 2017, p. 30). Counterintuitively, it is believed that, in this case, those who are unemployed are economically better off and therefore have the 'luxury' to to be more selective about work options (ibid).



Source: Current Labor Statistics October 2018, Philippine Statistics Authority

Chart 9 shows that throughout 2014 to 2018, the number of unemployed males are on the average twice as many as the number of unemployed females.



Source: Current Labor Statistics October 2018, Philippine Statistics Authority

From 2014 to 2018, the most number of unemployed individuals comes from the 15 – 24 years old and 25 – 34 years old age group which constitutes around 80% of the total unemployed individuals. This means younger Filipinos have much more difficulty and face more barriers than their elder peers in terms of access to employment. The ILO (2017, p.31) cites a study that observed that starting 2001, companies were hiring older and more experienced workers and avoided young workers in order to minimize training costs. In fact, when the 2008 global financial crisis hit the country, workers laid off ‘were either those near retirement or the very new workers, usually aged 15 to 19’ (ibid).

Another aspect related to the youth are those who are ‘neither in employment, education or training (NEET) (ILO 2017, p.32). According to the ILO (ibid) almost one in four youth is in this group, which has ‘serious long-term and generational implications.’ Moreover, women are around 1.8 times higher than men in this category, which underscores gender discrimination in the workforce and in the education and training sphere (ibid).

Underemployment tells a far more interesting story. As people in the country cannot afford generally to be unemployed, especially with no adequate social security or safety nets to fall back, a huge chunk of the population have no choice but to work. Many of them are underemployed, engaged in precarious and vulnerable work, and can be found in both the formal and informal sectors.

Looking at Chart 8, one sees that in 1999, underemployment stood at a high of 22 percent and it has since progressively declined to 15 percent in 2002. From 2005 to 2007, levels reverted back up to 21-22 percent, and then dropped to 17.5 in 2008. It increased to 19 percent from 2009 to 2014, slightly dipped to 18 percent in 2015/2016, then further declined to 16 percent in the first half of 2017 and further dipped to 15.9 in the third of the same year. In

2018, underemployment rates stayed for the most part at 17 percent but then plummeted to a record-low of 13 percent by the last quarter of the year. In general terms, this means that underemployment has steadily decreased in the last three years, and reached a record-low of 13 percent by the end of 2018.

According to a 2016 labor force survey (Pasion, 2017), 15.6 million or 38 percent of the total working population fall under the informal sector such as the self-employed and unpaid family workers. Many of them are engaged in precarious labor<sup>8</sup>; they are the ambulant vendors, domestic helpers, tricycle and jeepney drivers, unpaid family workers, to name a few.

Based on the 2008 Informal Sector Survey of the PSA, males constitute about two-thirds of the informal sector operators (workers who are self-employed or are employers in an own-family operated farm or business). About 47.4 percent or almost half of the total sector operators are farmers, forestry workers and fishermen (ibid).

On the other hand, given women have lower labor force participation rates, they are more likely to register in the informal sector, many of them working as unpaid family workers (Albert and Vizmanos 2018). This category is oftentimes referred to as vulnerable employment which 'is defined as the sum of the employment status groups of own-account workers (self-employed) and contributing family workers. They are less likely to have formal work arrangements, and are therefore more likely to lack decent working conditions, adequate social security and 'voice' through effective representation by trade unions and similar organizations' (ILO 2010, [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS\\_120470/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS_120470/lang-en/index.htm)).

Table 2 provides evidence that 55.8 percent or more than half of the country's total employment are in the informal sector. Informal employment covers 'an overwhelming majority (80.8 percent) within the agriculture sector, particularly those workers under 'agriculture, hunting and forestry' and 'fishing and agriculture', operate within the informal sector, at 80.6 and 82 percentages respectively. Also 46% of service sector workers are located in the informal sector, an overwhelming majority of whom are found in the 'wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (69.5 percent),' 'transport and storage' (55.6 percent) and accommodation and food service activities (53 percent). What is particularly disturbing is that the industry sector has a very high proportion of informal workers at 43.8 percent, and that a significant percentage (40.3 percent) of workers in the manufacturing, a sub-sector characterized by higher levels of productivity, are informally employed! Additional research is required as to the high levels of informal employment across sectors, and most intriguingly in the manufacturing sub-sector, and what policies and programs are needed to address this urgent issue.

We have established thus far that employment levels have improved in the last three years, with data corroborated particularly by lower underemployment rates during the same period in question. Government generally credits this rise in employment to its 'Build, build, build'

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<sup>8</sup> Precarious labor is the result of employment practices by employers designed to limit or reduce their permanent workforce to a minimum, to maximize their flexibility, and to shift risks onto workers (ILO 2011, p.6) . The resulting jobs typically are non-permanent, temporary, casual, insecure and contingent (ibid). Workers in such jobs often are not covered by labor laws and social security protection (ibid).

**Table 2: Underemployment, vulnerable, precarious and informal employment by industry, 2015**

Major industry group	Underemployed		Vulnerable employment		Employees in precarious work		Informal employment	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>7 180</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>14 569</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>7 040</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>21 609</b>	<b>55.8</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>2 906</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>7 131</b>	<b>63.1</b>	<b>1 990</b>	<b>57.7</b>	<b>9 121</b>	<b>80.8</b>
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	2 558	25.6	6 134	61.5	1 904	60.4	8 038	80.6
Fishing and aquaculture	348	26.3	997	75.5	86	29.3	1 083	82.0
<b>Industry</b>	<b>1 271</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>2 025</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>2 751</b>	<b>43.8</b>
Mining and quarrying	66	28.1	55	23.4	56	31.6	111	47.2
Manufacturing	576	17.9	638	19.9	656	26.3	1 294	40.3
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	10	12.0	-	-	16	19.3	16	19.3
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	9	17.3	3	5.8	10	20.4	13	25.0
Construction	610	22.6	31	1.1	1 287	48.6	1 318	48.9
<b>Services</b>	<b>3 003</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>6 712</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>3 025</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>9 737</b>	<b>46.0</b>
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	993	13.6	4 261	58.3	819	29.0	5 080	69.5
Transport and storage	502	18.1	1 260	45.3	285	19.1	1 545	55.6
Accommodation and food service activities	242	14.1	582	33.9	328	30.7	910	53.0
Information and communication	41	10.8	68	17.8	63	20.7	131	34.4
Financial and insurance activities	41	8.2	20	4.0	52	10.9	72	14.5
Real estate activities	21	11.4	66	35.9	16	14.2	82	44.6
Professional, scientific and technical activities	22	10.6	35	16.8	24	14.5	59	28.4
Administrative and support service activities	104	9.1	33	2.9	171	15.6	204	17.9
Public administration and defense; compulsory social security	326	15.6	-	-	370	17.7	370	17.7
Education	116	9.0	13	1.0	106	8.4	119	9.3
Human health and social work activities	48	9.7	25	5.1	65	14.2	90	18.2
Arts, entertainment and recreation	71	20.7	33	9.6	73	23.9	106	30.9
Other service activities	475	17.4	317	11.6	651	27.1	968	35.4
Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies	a	a	-	-	1	33.3	1	33.3

Source: Labor Force Survey, Philippine Statistics Authority

program. But as earlier stated, it is not employment per se that matter for the reduction of poverty and inequality, but rather the quality of employment. If the majority of workers are in the informal sector, then it can be concluded that many Filipinos may have work, but that they are still poor and constitute the working poor population. This is not the development that the country needs. More developmental ambition and political will are needed to get Filipinos out of poverty (even if concession in this paper is made to use an official poverty line that is already too low).

This therefore requires further unpacking employment across the various economic sectors, namely, agriculture, industry/manufacturing and services.

## Sectoral Employment

**Agriculture.** Performance in this area is generally depressing. From 1998 to 2005, agricultural output has been dismally low, hovering between 8 to 13 percent. And if one thought it could not get any lower, it actually did. From 2006 to 2010, output fell to 8 from 12 percent, and from 2011 to 2018, output further plummeted from 10 to 6 percent. In the first quarter of 2019, agricultural output stood at a deplorable 6.6 percent. This means that the Duterte Administration did not reverse the steady decline in agricultural output; instead, it merely continued its deplorable performance. The glaring lack of public investment in agriculture and

the long-term decline of agricultural output has condemned farmers to marginal, low-value work, and has seriously jeopardized the country's food security.

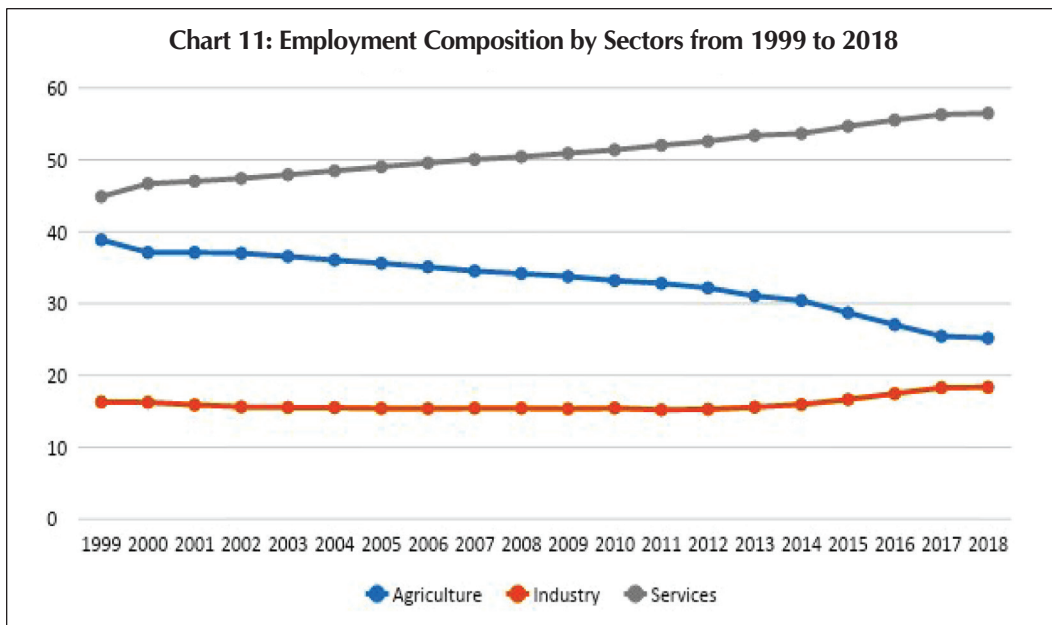
In the meantime, after thirty years of agrarian reform implementation in the post-Marcos era, vast tracts of land remain in the grip of private hands due to a stalled agrarian reform program. As of May 2019, DAR still has a whopping 600,000 hectares to be distributed to farmers under its agrarian reform program with only three years left under the current dispensation (DAR website 2019 <http://www.dar.gov.ph/articles/news/101257>), a feat which many doubt will be accomplished given the excruciating slow pace of implementation. More than that, landed families and their business partners have been managed to escape agrarian reform by resorting to various legal loopholes which has facilitated massive land conversion of agricultural lands into commercial and industrial estates (Flores-Obanil, Carmina, Manahan Mary, Leaseback Arrangements: Reversing Agrarian Reform Gains in the Philippines; YEAR page 2).

Furthermore, data from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) have shown that Agribusiness Venture Agreements (AVAs) facilitated by the Department have generally not benefitted the majority farmers groups who entered into AVAs with the corporate sector, much less improved their incomes or living conditions (Aquino, 2019).

The dismally low levels of agricultural productivity have meant that farmers and fisherfolk constitute the country's poorest sectors. As such, there has been a steady decrease in agricultural employment: In 1998, sectoral employment stood at 38 percent; by 2017 this fell to 25 percent and in 2018, employment further plummeted to a historic low of 21.1 percent or a loss of 4.1 percent. In April 2017, there were 26.1 percent employed in agriculture but this fell to 23.9 percent during the same period of the following year which translates to a loss of 723,000 farmers who lost their jobs (Rey, Rappler 2018).

Moreover, the average age of Filipino farmers today is 57-59 years old, as young people in rural areas have become more and more discouraged to go into farming (Lazaro, Ramon; Aspiring farmers urged to embrace technology; 2018). Given the poverty wages and the lack of decent work in rural areas, the age-old outmigration from rural to urban areas accelerates, with rural folk in search of jobs that fetch relatively better pay. In spite all these, agriculture remains the second largest contributor to employment (Philippine Statistics Authority; Selected Statistics on Agriculture 2018; page 5; <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Selected%20Statistics%20on%20Agriculture%202018.pdf>).

It is clear that after three years, the Duterte administration has failed to increase the productivity and rural incomes of farmers, much less facilitate their access to innovative farming techniques as outlined in its Philippine Development Plan. On the contrary, the current policy initiatives of government such as accelerated conversion of agricultural lands into industrial, commercial and residential estates and the rice tariffication law has meant the further marketization of agriculture to benefit big business, including those representing global capital. Small farmers, tenants and agricultural workers are now left more and more at the mercy of market forces, with hardly any support from government as evidenced by its dismally low productivity levels and the sputtering of the agrarian reform program.



Source: World Bank: World Development Indicators

**Services.** The services sector has taken huge and aggressive strides such that by 1998, it dominated and overtook other sectors. From 1998 until 2010, its contribution to GDP ranged from 43 to 47 percent; and from 2011 to 2019, it seesawed between 45 to 49 percent. In 2018 and the first quarter of 2019, its average contribution to GDP stood at a whopping 46 to 49 percent .

It stands to reason that majority of jobs in the country can be found in this sector. From 1998 up to the 3rd quarter of 2018 (or a span of about two decades), services sector contribution to employment has steadily climbed, peaking at 58.8 percent in the third quarter of 2018, and then falling to 55.6 percent in the 4th quarter (or a loss of 3.2 percentage points). On average however, contribution to employment by this sector stood at 57 percent for 2018. It is most likely that the loss of jobs in the agricultural sector is absorbed by the service sector in urban areas, in particular, work that is of very low-value, unstable, and located in the informal economy.

It is observed that a third of the Philippine labor force is from the wholesale and retail trade and motor vehicle repair. By 2018, this economic sub-sector within the service sector stood at 7.9 million workers while those working in the transportation and storage sub-sector numbered around 3.18 million (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018 Compilation of Industry on labor and employment, pages 2-45 to 2-96)

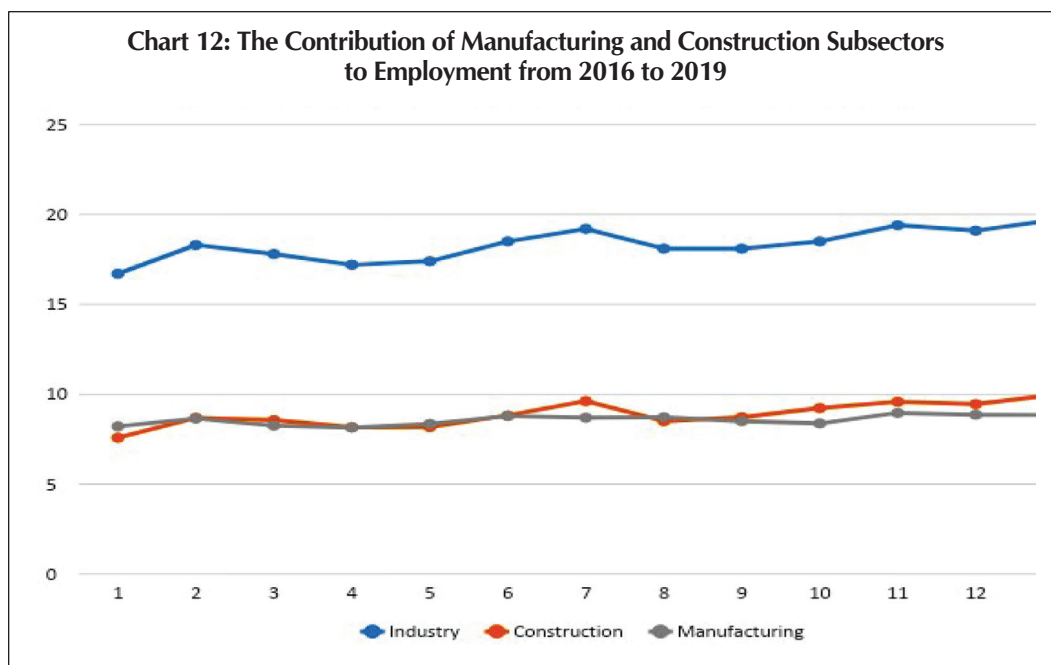
As earlier noted, much of the growth in the Philippine economy is derived from services, particularly those who own and control estates, rentals and other businesses, financial intermediation as well as transportation and communication facilities.

**Industry and Manufacturing.** Industry contribution to GDP generally remained stagnant as it fluctuated between 26 to 29 percent from 1999 to 2019, or a span of two decades. Manufacturing



output for 2018, on the other hand, contributed 15.8 percent to GDP. This however rose for the first time to 19.6 percent in 2017, and eased to 19.4 percent in 2018.

Historically speaking, in the post-Marcos era, the lowest contributor to employment is also in this sector; ironically the most dynamic sector with the most potential of generating decent work, especially the manufacturing sub-sector.



Source: Labor Force Surveys, PSA

From 1998 to 2015, industrial employment stagnated at 16 percent. Interestingly, however, from 2016 onwards, industrial employment breached the 16 percent mark after 17 years. In 2016 it stood at 17 percent and in 2018 it climbed to 18 percent.

Within industry, the sub-sector with the highest increase in employment is in construction, understandably with the country’s Build, Build, Build program. It grew from 3.55 million in 2017 to 4.02 million in 2018, or an additional 470,000 construction workers.

The second biggest increase is in manufacturing, considered the most dynamic sector of the economy. In 2017, its sectoral contribution to employment posted its highest record at 20 percent but decreased to 19 percent by end-2018. In absolute terms however its workers increased; in 2017, there were 3.54 million workers and this increased to 3.65 million or an additional 110,000 new workers in this sector. This means there are more workers now in the industrial sector in general, and the manufacturing and construction sub-sector in particular. (Rey, Rappler 2018).

Can this be the reason Sec. Pernia of the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) observed in a pre- State of the Nation (SONA) briefing in July 2018 that ‘the economy is ...

undergoing structural transformation as growth is now increasingly driven by investments vis-à-vis consumption on the demand side, and by the industry sector—manufacturing in particular—relative to the services sector on the supply side’?

However, there are a number of issues that threaten the capacity of the manufacturing sector to provide decent work. For one, there is the alarming finding that even if manufacturing employment increased, a significant percentage of workers in this sub-sector remains underemployed (17.7 percent), vulnerably employed (19.9 percent) precariously employed (26.3 percent) and informally employed (40.3percent), in other words, they are still not engaged in decent work, or in quality jobs. Second, a very disturbing trend is noted among companies, that is, in spite rising labor productivity growth, and therefore increasing profits for companies, data show that these companies do not adequately share their profits to their workers as witnessed by the stagnation of real average wages from 2001 to 2016. See Chart 13.



Source: Social Weather Station: Monitoring Economic Well-Being: the SWS Approach [https://www.sws.org.ph/downloads/publications/pr20180306\\_Monitoring%20Economic%20Well-being\\_PES-SWS%20Forum.pdf](https://www.sws.org.ph/downloads/publications/pr20180306_Monitoring%20Economic%20Well-being_PES-SWS%20Forum.pdf)

These two trends seriously undermine the transformative potential of employment in manufacturing. Furthermore, the government’s manufacturing paradigm is generally focused on inserting local industries into foreign dominated global value chains (GVCs) which immediately limits the productivity level of local firms (such as at the assembly-level in the production chain) and does not provide adequate emphasis on building the country’s domestic industries, especially micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) which comprise about 99 percent of all businesses in the country.

In terms of horizontal inequalities such as in the case of children, one can also say that decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) has been achieved when there is no poverty and especially



when children can go to school without needing to think about their family's survival (Save the Children, Highlights of the Children's Consultation on the SDGs, 2019). This immediately implies that child labor should be nonexistent (ibid). The Department of Labor (DOLE) defines child labor as any work or economic activity performed by a child that subjects him/her to any form of exploitation or is harmful to his/her health and safety or physical, mental or psychosocial development (ibid). However, in reality, children are still being pushed by parents to work and syndicates recruiting children to do their bidding (Save the Children, 2019b).

A narrative report by Save the Children 2019 (Violence Against Children and the SDGs, 2019c) reveals key insights in child workers, child labor, programs addressing child labor, recruitment of children into armed groups and the status of children in situations of armed conflict. There are 3,312,000 estimated number of children aged 5 to 17 years who worked for at least one hour during the week in October 2011 while there are 2,097,000 children or 63.3% of the working children population are into child labor (ibid). While there is a 6.87% decrease in reported hazardous child labor since 2001, there are still 2,048,769 children or 97.7% of the child laborers are into hazardous work which is still considerably high and 1,817,258 children or 88.7% are in hazardous work environment (ibid).

Refer to Annex A: TABLE 1 Children 5 to 17 years old by employment status and region 2011 SOC, Annex B: TABLE 2 Working children 5 to 17 years old by type of work, sex, age group and region: 2011 SOC

Save the Children (2019b) reports the three reasons why these cases are even worsening, which are, one, children are becoming parents, two, their parents do not have stable jobs and three, the community itself fosters child labor with sayings 'ok lang nabata ang magtrabaho (it is okay that children work).'

To address child labor, DOLE shows its firm upholding of children's rights by implementing myriad of laws and regulations, policies and social programs such as prohibition of forced labor and of child trafficking. (Save the Children 2019a)

According to the same Save the Children Report (2019a)

'Although there are no official and published data on recruitment of children into armed groups, the United Nations reported several child recruitment instances in the Philippines. They verified the recruitment and use of 30 children (6 girls, 8 boys, 16 sex unknown) by armed groups. 16 children were used as human shields by BIFF in a single incident; 6 were recruited and used by NPA; and 8 by the Maute Group. Children were recruited and used for combat, as part of medical squads, as cooks and to extract gunpowder from firecrackers. Moreover, UN received additional unverified reports of the large-scale recruitment and use of children by the Maute Group during the Marawi siege and of nine children recruited by NPA, indicating that the actual number of violations is likely higher. Some of the children were reportedly killed in combat. They also documented the detention of 12 children for their alleged association with armed groups, none of whom were formally charged. For example, four boys were arrested and detained by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for their alleged association with ASG. The boys were blindfolded, handcuffed and beaten during their detention and subsequently taken to a hospital for medical treatment. Lastly in 2017, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

began working together with the United Nations by signing a Joint Action Plan to end the recruitment and use of children. It has been completed and resulted in the disengagement of 1,869 children from the ranks of MILF. As such, the MILF has been removed from the UN list of armed groups recruiting and using children.'

Persons with disabilities might best be described, in the media at least, as an invisible minority: though a large segment of the population has a physical or mental disability they have been almost entirely absent from the mass media until recent years (Leonor, 2012). Moreover, when persons with disabilities appear they almost always do so in stereotyped roles (ibid).

DOLE's Special Employment Assistance for Disabled Persons stated that disabled individuals often had a hard time getting decent work because many employers view them as incapacitated to work (DOLE, 2018). However, according to the labor code of employment, disabled persons have the right to work, and should only be rejected if the job is literally harmful and unsuitable based on his/her disability (ibid). With this, the government launched the *TULAY, Tulong, Alalay sa Taong may Kapansanan* program which aims to help disabled people find jobs. The program also teaches and trains persons with disabilities to undertake various livelihood programs and enhance their skills (ibid).

Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor and Employment has come up with a set of strategies on how they will those disabled find jobs and sources of income (DOLE, 2018). Examples of these are to explore the possibility of registering persons with disabilities in an agency; to survey and keep an inventory of companies, government and non - government agencies, local government units and funding institutions (local and foreign) that have programs geared for PWDs; closely coordinate with private companies, GOs, NGOs, LGUs and funding institutions particularly those for PWDs; maintain a skills pool of persons with disabilities in case employment opportunities emerge; and establish cooperatives, production workshops and self - employment projects for the PWDs (ibid).

However, in spite of the various efforts carried out by the government in providing full and productive employment to PWDs, it seems that employment opportunities for this segment of the population are still extremely limited. Schelzig through the Asian Development Bank (2005) noted that out of more than 100,000 employable PWDs that are registered with the DOLE, only less than 10 percent are wage employed (Schelzig 2005).

A pioneering survey on the socioeconomic conditions of PWDs in selected cities in Metro Manila, which was conducted in August 2008 jointly by the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) and the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), revealed that slightly more than half of the PWD respondents have income-generating job/business (Mori & Yamagata, 2009). Out of those with job/business, almost 50 percent engage themselves (either full-time or part-time) into other small-scale income-generating activities, which are usually under informal arrangements. Meanwhile, around 25 percent of the PWD respondents rely merely on supports from family members/friends, benefits from the government, or even from begging (ibid).

It is unfortunate that even near-accurate data or social statistics on the number of persons with disabilities in the Philippines is hard to come by for the simple reason that the country's information infrastructure is not yet fully developed (Kono, 2019). Systematic data gathering

remains one of the country's great challenge considering how fragmented the Philippine's 7,100 islands are and how severe the economic problems loom over its people (ibid). This prevents the Philippine Government from developing the right programs for the disabled sector (ibid). There were various attempts in the past to come up with accurate statistics, specifically the creation of a Registry of PWDs as mandated under Republic Act No. 7277 and Article 31 of the UNCRPD, however, these proved to be unsuccessful (ibid).

On social protection, the country has a range of programs geared towards helping the population, especially the poor and socially excluded groups, deal with sudden shocks that may result in a loss of income, displacement of homes and livelihoods due to disasters and emergencies, both natural and man-made. A prime example of this is the massively funded conditional cash transfer program called PantawidPamilya as well as a number of unconditional cash grants for certain low-income groups. According to the National Anti-Poverty Commission (Africa, et al 2017, p. 47), the main advantage of these programs is

'their immediate welfare benefit to those who are able to avail of them. This is certainly important and quantifiable to the extent that the reported magnitudes of beneficiaries and benefits are valid....

The main limitation of these social protection measures that that many of them are 'residual' in the sense that they simply serve to mitigate some of the worst impacts of macroeconomic policies that have resulted in impoverishment, without inviting interrogation of the main development strategy that that led to increased poverty in the first place. There is also often the underlying assumption that widespread poverty is the result of individual failings rather than the outcome of societal structural processes, as is oftentimes the case. Apart from these, there are also widespread concerns about inefficient implementation, exclusion and inclusion errors, leakages, vulnerability to clientelistic politics, and others. Finally it is widely observed that social protection programs are fragmented, and that there is a need to build the technical and administrative capacities of agencies in the frontline of social protection delivery.'

### **Some Recommendations to Combat Vertical and Horizontal Inequality and Promote Inclusive Growth, Enhance Productivity and Decent Work**

1. Equitably spread the gains of growth so that those excluded from the dynamic growth zones such as farmers, fisherfolk, the urban poor, others operating in the informal economy and engaged in vulnerable and precarious employment substantially benefit. These can be done through the following:
  - a. Correctly tax those who have significantly benefited from the growth within the last decade by improving tax administration, address tax evasion and avoidance so that additional public revenues are generated; suspend regressive taxation (e.g., fuel tax) borne by the poor and low-income groups;
  - b. Significantly increase public investments in agriculture (which includes fishing and forestry) and focus on increasing the productivity and incomes of farmers and fisherfolk;
  - c. Complete agrarian reform in Private Agricultural Lands (PAL) and significantly increase public investment in support services so that agrarian reform beneficiaries

(ARBs) can adequately earn from their newly-acquired land. This will also stem the widespread practice of ARBs re-selling their land due to lack of government support to make their lands productive;

- d. Stop the rampant practice of agricultural land conversion to industrial, commercial and residential estates. Instead, the government should come up with a National Land Use Plan that provides a premium to ensuring the country's food security/sovereignty and consider sustainable development principles in the use of the country's land and other resources;
- e. Decisively address the lop-sided character of Agricultural Venture Agreements (AVAs) where farmers are generally disadvantaged. To this end, government should tap an independent and competent research entity to assess DAR's AVA program and make the necessary recommendations with a view to ensuring that farmers equally benefit from any joint partnership with the private sector;
- f. Provide universal quality social services that are affordable and accessible, in particular, education, health, housing and in the provision of water and sanitation and target hard-to-reach groups, especially those in far-flung, remote and upland areas. For indigenous peoples, Muslims and other diverse groups, employ culturally appropriate development approaches in the provision of their needs. For them as well as for Persons with Disabilities, the elderly, children and the youth, women and other socially excluded and discriminated groups, ensure participatory approaches in the design, implementation and monitoring of programs which can enhance their well-being and productivity;
- g. Improve the quality and outreach of education at all levels with a view to building a medium to high skilled workforce that can undertake industrial upgrading, diversification and innovation;
- h. Re-orient social protection from its residual policy framework and link it to a broader developmental agenda that is transformative and which upholds universal social policy. In this light, promote the progressive version of the universal social protection floor and work closely with various citizens' movements in the country and abroad, government agencies, and the International Labor Organization (ILO);
- i. On children, the following are proposed (Save the Children, 2019):
  - more livelihood programs for parents and more scholarships to support children and not force them to work to sustain their education;
  - As long as it is not forced and they work after school hours, children 15 and above should be provided a safe work environment so there should be stricter implementation of laws on this;
  - There should be career assessment, and studies on job trends and Skills learned in school should match the jobs needed by companies;
  - strengthen 4Ps by improving its monitoring system, and more accountability platforms;
  - Children should be consulted about the changes in laws affecting them such as the lowering of the criminal age.
- j. On Persons with Disabilities, the following recommendations are proposed by the Institute on Disability and Public Policy through their Program Associate Della Leonor (2019):
  - Challenges faced by Persons with Disabilities are of a magnitude that when ignored, can lead to total scraping. There is therefore a call to the academic

body to ensure that a direct research involving PWDs is conducted to address eradication of the inequalities that persons with disabilities face. The United Nations Convention for persons with disabilities reiterates its general provisions in Article 27. A Medium is needed to promote, evaluate, monitor its functionality is needed. (IDPP, 2019)

- Regarding UNCRPD, it appears that people has been analyzing its viability. The three pillars of sustainability framework is a multidisciplinary implementation and solutions oriented approach that recognizes most successful and scalable sustainability solutions require the presence of, and are driven by, all three pillars simultaneously: 1) technology and innovation; 2) laws and governance; and 3) economics and financial incentives. The three pillars framework is strategic because it often reveals or describes specific and feasible changes that advance sustainability solutions within markets and institutional settings. (Clune and Zehnder, 2018)
- There are a lot of diverse occurrence in the community about inclusiveness in the community, which is a central element. They are saddened by the fact that persons with disabilities are still discriminated. It has been also been debated of how disable persons be able to be functional in the real world. But still there is a question on the U.N. mandate for equality and integration have on persons with disabilities. (Quinn, 2008)
- Ruiz agreed on Article 32 on International cooperation is going to be key in helping to make implementation as the target of change especially in those countries where disability has been neglected. While on the subject of non-discrimination, it has to be recalled that comparative law throughout the world adds an obligation of “reasonable accommodation” in the context of disability. Including these rights was entirely appropriate if only for the simple reason that it is obviously not enough to remove formal obstacles to persons with disabilities-it is also necessary to equip them with the means needed to make new opportunities a reality. (Quinn & Stein 2008).
- Finally, they may not agree on some areas but nevertheless it is clearly stated that a full realization of the UNCRPD is in order and applying its laws in media promotion helping participation of persons with disabilities. Disability must be one of the cross-cutting issues to be taken into account when designing goals, targets and indicators; (OECD, 2014)
- The UN High Level Panel has called for a data revolution. The world’s population should be counted, measured, weighed and evaluated. This information should be collected, compiled, aggregated, and presented in such a form that it can usefully inform policy makers and citizens in aggregated forms, and disaggregated according to region, village, and gender and population group. (Jerven, 2014)
- Formulate policies of full support for all PWDs in research, education, health and well-being. Through these, all PWDs must be counted and registered. (IDPP, 2019)
- Disaggregate data to measure the gaps between social groups including persons with disabilities and identify who is being left behind. Set targets to reduce these gaps (e.g., in health and education outcomes, in incomes and employment) will ensure that the most deprived are not “left until last” (UN Habitat III, 2017);

- The study on disability acknowledges that States have started to treat disability as a broad human rights issue, and that references to the rights of disabled persons in States parties' periodic reports have increased in recent years. However, the study also observes that only a few States report regularly on the situation affecting the rights of persons with disabilities, and that the amount and the quality of the information provided in the reports vary greatly from treaty to treaty. In order to improve State practice with regard to periodic reporting on disability issues, the study recommends that States increase their efforts to address thoroughly the question of the human rights of persons with disabilities in their periodic reports. It also suggests that in preparing their reports, States should consult more closely with disability NGOs - especially those established by and for persons with disabilities. Finally, the study encourages States to consider nominating persons with disabilities for election to the treaty-monitoring bodies. (Bruce et al, 2002)
  - Key actors and stakeholders are requested to closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of goals. (IDPP, 2019).
2. Catalyze the process of structural transformation through clean, green agro-industrialization and the creation and strengthening of decent work. To this end, the government should:
    - a. Significantly increase public investment in all sectors—agriculture, industry and manufacturing, services so that labor productivity growth significantly increases;
    - b. Ensure that the 'fruits' of labor productivity growth is equitably shared between capitalists and workers so that decent incomes, including benefits, are adequately provided;
    - c. Transition workers from informal to formal, from vulnerable to stable, and from precarious to regular employment across all three sectors so that decent work is achieved;
    - d. Significantly invest in clean and green technologies, renewable energy and reduce, if not ultimately phase out, dirty technology in the country's production system.
  3. Promote the political space and generate resources to help strengthen social movements, trade unions and civil society so that they can effectively tip the balance of power and ensure that policies and programs benefit the majority of Filipinos who are poor and socially excluded;
  4. Develop the state's 'activist' orientation so that it proactively intervenes to develop the country's domestic industries, including MSMEs, effectively regulates the private sector and upholds the rights of its people, especially poor and low-income groups, including the marginalized and socially excluded, and protects and promotes the environment.



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Annex A: TABLE 1 Children 5 to 17 years old by employment status and region 2011 SOC

TABLE 1 Children 5 to 17 years old by employment status and region: 2011 SOC

Region	Total	Employment status	
		Working	Non-working
<b>Philippines</b>			
Number (in thousands)	26,617	3,312	23,305
Percent	100.0	12.4	87.6
National Capital Region	100.0	5.4	94.6
Cordillera Administrative Region	100.0	12.5	87.5
Region I - Ilocos Region	100.0	8.7	91.3
Region II - Cagayan Valley	100.0	13.6	86.4
Region III - Central Luzon	100.0	10.4	89.6
Region IVA - CALABARZON	100.0	10.1	89.9
Region IVB - MIMAROPA	100.0	16.8	83.2
Region V- Bicol	100.0	17.2	82.8
Region VI - Western Visayas	100.0	12.3	87.7
Region VII - Central Visayas	100.0	13.9	86.1
Region VIII - Eastern Visayas	100.0	17.4	82.6
Region IX - Zamboanga Peninsula	100.0	17.2	82.8
Region X - Northern Mindanao	100.0	22.1	77.9
Region XI - Davao	100.0	13.9	86.1
Region XII - SOCCSKSARGEN	100.0	14.0	86.0
Region XIII - Caraga	100.0	15.0	85.0
Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	100.0	5.8	94.2

Source: NSO & ILO-IFEC, 2011 Survey on Children (SOC), Final Results

**Annex B: TABLE 2 Working children 5 to 17 years old by type of work, sex, age group and region: 2011 SOC**

**TABLE 2 Working children 5 to 17 years old by type of work, sex, age group and region : 2011 SOC**

Sex, age group and region	Total working children	Child labor			Net child labor
		Total	Hazardous child labor	Other child labor	
<b>Philippines</b>					
Number (in thousands)	3,312	2,097	2,049	49	1,214
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Sex</b>					
Boys	62.9	66.5	66.7	55.0	56.6
Girls	37.1	33.5	33.3	45.0	43.4
<b>Age group</b>					
5 - 9	8.8	6.5	6.6	1.7	12.9
10 -14	38.0	35.3	33.8	38.3	42.7
15 -17	53.2	58.3	59.7	0.0	44.5
<b>Region</b>					
National Capital Region	4.8	4.4	4.5	1.8	5.4
Cordillera Administrative Region	1.8	2.0	2.0	0.4	1.3
Region I - Ilocos Region	3.8	3.9	3.9	4.1	3.5
Region II - Cagayan Valley	3.8	4.4	4.3	7.2	2.8
Region III - Central Luzon	8.7	10.5	10.6	7.5	5.7
Region IVA - CALABARZON	10.0	8.3	8.0	18.6	12.9
Region IVB - MIMAROPA	4.9	5.3	5.4	1.9	4.2
Region V- Bicol	9.2	10.4	10.5	2.5	7.1
Region VI - Western Visayas	7.9	8.2	8.2	7.9	7.2
Region VII - Central Visayas	8.3	7.4	7.4	7.6	9.7
Region VIII - Eastern Visayas	7.2	7.0	7.1	4.0	7.5
Region IX - Zamboanga Peninsula	6.0	4.9	4.7	10.0	8.1
Region X - Northern Mindanao	8.3	8.5	8.6	3.4	8.0
Region XI - Davao	6.0	4.7	4.5	10.8	6.6
Region XII - SOCCSKSARGEN	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.3
Region XIII - Caraga	3.4	3.0	3.0	3.2	4.2
Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	1.9	2.1	2.0	4.0	1.5

Source: NSO & ILO-IPEC, 2011 Survey on Children (SOC), Final Results

## SDG 13

# Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

**Roberto Verzola**

Chairman, Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technology (CREST)

### Introduction

When Christiana Figueres, former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), gave a talk before Philippine climate activists in February 2019, she asked the 60-years old and above to raise their hands. A few did. Christiana admitted she was part of this cohort. She then asked the audience to give a big hand for these seniors, and explained why:

*They are, she said, part of a truly special generation, the last human generation that lived in the previous geological epoch called the Holocene. That epoch is gone. We live today, Christiana said, in a new geological epoch that is very different from the Holocene Epoch. It is called the Anthropocene Epoch. This new geological epoch shows unique physical, chemical and biological planetary features arising from the distinctive impacts of a single species, Homo sapiens.*



### Enter the Anthropocene

Let us recall the geological epochs, starting with the present and going back in time: Anthropocene, Holocene, Pleistocene, Pliocene, Miocene, Oligocene, Eocene, and Paleocene (Eldredge, 2001; Hall, 1997).

The epoch before the Paleocene belongs to the Dinosaur (**Mesozoic**) Era, which was cut short by a huge meteorite that struck the Earth some 65 million years ago, resulting in a mass extinction event, the fifth in the planet's history.

That mass extinction of species led to the **Paleocene** (65-56 million years ago), which saw global temperatures as well as sea levels gradually rise and reach a maximum, melting all ice caps. There was no Philippine archipelago as such. Zamboanga peninsula was in the general area, which was mostly ocean; Mindoro and Palawan were far to the north, just south of Taiwan; and Bicol, Samar, Leyte and eastern Mindanao were thousands of kilometers to the east, near what is now Papua New Guinea.



The **Eocene** (56–34 MYA) was still very warm and ice-free, but sea levels were gradually falling. In this epoch, small mammals appeared more frequently in the fossil record. More of the bigger islands – Sulu, Tawi-tawi, and the rest of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao – emerged above the sea level.

The **Oligocene** (34-23 MYA) continued the global cooling trend. Grasses and larger mammals like elephants and early horses appeared during this epoch. Plate tectonics moved Mindoro and Palawan southwards, Bicol and eastern Visayas and Mindanao westwards, and the rest of Visayas and Luzon northwards. Our archipelago was starting to converge.

During the **Miocene** (23-5.3 MYA), a warming followed by a cooling trend saw the rise of kelp forests and grasslands. Apes first appeared on the fossil record. Plate tectonic movements have finally assembled our archipelago together.

The **Pliocene** (5.3-2.6 MYA) saw the enormous spread of grasslands and savannas and, after them, grazing animals. It was a time of global cooling, creating land bridges that facilitated the spread of these ecosystems. Some apes came down from the trees and began living in the savannas. *Australopithecus*, our ape-human ancestor, emerged during this epoch. All our islands finally emerge from the sea. Monkeys reached many of them, but no apes did.

The **Pleistocene** (2.6 MYA-11,700 years ago) featured the appearance of genus *Homo* and its subsequent spread throughout the world. At the same time, many large mammals became extinct, a phenomenon that is often associated with hunting by humans. Towards the end of this epoch, our fully-formed archipelago is colonized by early hunter-gatherers.

The **Holocene** (11,700 years ago to the mid-20th century) marks a transition from hunting and gathering to animal husbandry and agriculture, the subsequent rise of human civilizations, and the absolute domination of all ecosystems by our species, *Homo sapiens*.

While earlier epochs usually lasted millions of years. The Holocene lasted only some 11,700 years. The epoch that cut it short, the epoch that we live in today, is the **Anthropocene** (Malhi, 2017).

The current epoch distinguishes itself from the previous one through the following unique features:

1. A significant drop in the number of species, so extensive that the phenomenon is now considered the sixth great wave of extinctions on the planet, the fifth being the wave of extinctions that occurred 65 million years ago due to a meteorite impact that ended the reign of the dinosaurs;
2. The detectable presence of unique toxic and non-biodegradable synthetic chemicals as well as microplastics in the geological stratum and global food chain, which eventually end up in animal including human bodies; and
3. A global climate crisis arising from the widespread destruction of forests and the massive burning of fossil fuels, resulting in a rapidly increasing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) concentration in the atmosphere, gradual global warming, rising sea levels, extreme weather events and major disruptions in the global circulatory patterns of warm and cold water in the oceans and warm and cold air on sea and land.



The third feature has become a focus of attention by an increasing number of scientists and policy-makers, resulting in its inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulated by the United Nations for the 21st century (United Nations, 2019).

SDG 13 commits the world “to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”.

## From climate change to climate crisis

The latest scientific word on climate change is the Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), issued in October 2018.

The October 2018 IPCC special report version addressed to policy-makers can be summarized as follows:

1. It helps policy-makers understand the impacts of a 1.5o Celsius warming above pre-industrial levels, to facilitate a better response to the threat of climate change (Chapter 1);
2. It shows how to stay within the small remaining global carbon budget, to bring down emissions to zero by mid-century and limit global warming to 1.5o C (Ch. 2);
3. It explains that keeping the temperature rise below 1.5o C is vital because adaptation will be less difficult and our world will suffer from fewer negative impacts from extreme weather events (Ch. 3);
4. It warns that land and ecosystem, energy, urban and infrastructure, and industrial systems must undergo transitions leading to systemic changes (Ch. 4);
5. It will be much harder to make these transitions and systemic changes if the temperature rise exceeds the 1.5o and especially if it reaches the 2.0o level (Ch. 5).

The implications of a higher than 1.5o are so dire that affected populations, especially the youth, are now increasingly calling the phenomenon not only climate change but also a climate crisis. Some, like 16-year old Swedish student Greta Thunberg, even call it a climate emergency (Guardian, 2019).

The increasing concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere has two well-known causes:

First, the massive clear-cutting of ancient and secondary growth forests throughout the world is removing major carbon sinks. Plants take in carbon dioxide from the air and in turn release oxygen. These forests are the lungs of the earth. Raze them and the Earth gets the equivalent of lung cancer.

Second, the massive mining and burning of fossil fuels is releasing long-sequestered carbon into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide, driving the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere even higher.

Carbon dioxide acts as a greenhouse gas (GHG) that causes global warming, The warming, in turn, triggers other previously unexpected phenomena like the activation of methanogenic bacteria in the soil and the release of long-sequestered undersea methane. Since methane is also a greenhouse gas that is more than twenty times more powerful in its effect than carbon

dioxide, these consequences bring us into previously uncharted territory and possibly more surprises in the future.

## **PH is especially vulnerable**

Impacts of climate change include sea-level rise, higher frequency and greater swings in extreme weather events, rising temperatures, extreme rainfall and flooding, ocean acidification, and some unexpected consequences.

From 2011 to 2018, the Philippines has been a consistent third placer in the annual climate-oriented World Risk Report, except in 2014, when it placed second (World Risk Report, 2018). The most vulnerable sectors are women, children, senior citizens, and people with disability, especially those who depend on natural resources for their livelihood.

Sitting astride the typhoon path from the mid-Pacific to mainland Asia, the Philippines is especially vulnerable to extreme weather events. This means larger and more frequent swings in dry and wet periods and in hot and cold temperatures. For instance, of the 10 worst typhoons that have hit the country since the 20th century, five occurred after 2006. Most Filipinos probably remember the worst – the 2013 typhoon Haiyan (local name: Yolanda).

With many of its population centers sited along the country's long coastline, the Philippines is also highly vulnerable to rising sea levels. Worse, sea levels around the country are rising faster than the global average. According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), some parts of eastern Visayas and Mindanao have already experienced twice the global average in sea-level rise (Kahana et. al., 2016). With land already limited and becoming scarce in the first place, the loss of urban and rural areas to the encroaching sea will further exacerbate the problem. PAGASA is now developing a user-friendly tool to determine detailed sectoral effects.

The impacts of these events on the country's food systems, health situation, livelihoods, employment, and peace and order are horrifying to imagine. The social fabric will be tested to its limits.

Being a relatively poor country, the Philippine has insufficient resources to deal with these climate impacts. Social services and government institutions will be stretched to the maximum, as they are forced to deal with the increasingly dire consequences of the climate crisis.

## **Disaster and climate change adaptation: a government priority**

The government is hard at work to develop adaptation measures that can help various sectors cope with these events by reducing risks, including framework plans to deal with natural disasters as well as climate change impacts and a detailed reporting system to determine the extent of damage and improve the effectivity of future adaptation.

With typhoons, floods, storm surges, earthquakes, tsunamis, and landslides occurring regularly, Since the country is already disaster-prone to start with. Thus, coping with the impacts of the climate crisis taps a similar set of skills and know-how as when coping with natural disasters.

The legal frameworks for enabling risk reduction management are R.A. 10121 for disaster risks and RA 9729/10174 for climate risks. These laws mandate the formulation of a National Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) Framework and Plan, and a National Climate Change Action Plan.

Local governments often take the lead in these matters because they are directly affected. Thus they are expected to localize the plans referred to above. However, their responses are typically limited due to fund constraints. It is also important to guard against adaptation measures with unintended consequences, for example, building elevated roads in response to flooding, which in the end cause even more flooding, because these waste scarce resources.

The key budgetary response from the government is the People's Survival Fund (PSF). Approved in 2012 as part of RA 10174, it is meant to support adaptation projects with P1 billion every year. Unfortunately, PSF project approvals have been quite slow. As of March 2018, only four local governments have managed to tap the PSF, for adaptation projects totalling P192 million (Global Green Growth Institute, 2018).

Thus, oftentimes during actual disasters, resources must be contributed by international aid agencies and local civil society organizations to take up the slack. Religious organizations like the Roman Catholic church are usually very active in these matters, especially with the issuance of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology, *Laudato Si'*.

## Philippine international commitments in mitigation

While adaptation addresses the effects of the climate crisis, mitigation addresses its causes.

At the 2015 climate change talks in Paris, the Philippine government submitted its "intended nationally-determined contributions" to address the causes of the climate crisis. The INDC included the following mitigation commitment:

*"The Philippines intends to undertake GHG (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions reduction of about 70% by 2030 relative to its business-as-usual (BAU) scenario of 2000-2030. Reduction of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions will come from energy, transport, waste, forestry and industry sectors. The mitigation contribution is conditioned on the extent of financial resources, including technology development and transfer, and capacity building, that will be made available to the Philippines."*

The reduction commitment of 70% was one of the five highest, among all the countries that signed the Paris agreement. Thanks to the hard work of the Philippine delegation to the climate negotiations, the Philippines is often hailed as a global leader in pushing for urgent action against the climate crisis.

Unfortunately, the government's efforts within the country do not measure up to its rhetoric in the international arena.

## Regreening the land

In a National Greening Program (NGP) launched at the start of the Aquino administration (E.O. 26, 2011), the government had targeted the replanting of 1.7 million hectares (Mha) of public domain lands from 2011-2016, or an annual average of 340,000 ha. The Department of Natural Resources (DENR) has reported exceeding this target, although mostly exotic species were involved and there is little data about long-term survival rates. The participation of some NGOs has not improved matters much, according to a critique by the late Dr. Perry Ong (former vice chair of the Foundation for Philippine Environment and subsequently dean of the College of Science of the University of the Philippines), due to problems such as “unreasonable planting requirements, strict eligibility requirements for people’s organizations, difficulty in communication with the DENR Central Office and in coordinating with the field offices, and various irregularities in the implementation process causing delays in issuance, or worse, non-issuance of contracts and payments” (NGP Summit, 2014).

Curiously enough, towards the end of President Aquino’s term, his administration launched an “expanded” NGP (E.O. 193, 2015). The expanded program proposed, presumably for the next administration, the rehabilitation of 7.1 Mha of degraded/denuded forest lands over a 12-year period 2016-2028, or a higher annual average of 592,000 hectares per year.

The Duterte administration reformulated the program and now calls it the “Enhanced National Greening Program” or e-NGP (DENR, 2019). Under the new e-NGP, the priority activities are:

1. rehabilitation of 1.2 Mha of denuded forests during the period 2017-2022; and
2. protection and maintainance of existing forests.

The target is a more modest 240,000 ha/year, compared to the Aquino administration’s 340,000 ha/year. The latter’s recommendation to ramp this up to 592,000 ha/year was ignored.

At this rate, the government will take 30 years to cover the 7.1 Mha of degraded/denuded forests that have been identified for rehabilitation.

This assumes, optimistically, that most planted seedlings grow into trees. However, many tree-planting activities involve no follow-up care, and many of the seedlings eventually die. Civil society groups in fact tend to consider the government reforestation program a failure.

There seems to be no sense of urgency about the whole thing. Every administration has had its own version of a “greening” program. More recent programs show no major innovation. It is business-as-usual in the forestry sector.

Perhaps, the only thing that is new is the political will that President Duterte showed in cleaning up the popular tourist destination, Boracay Island. We need the same political will to bring back our forests to their former majesty.

## Ten years of the Renewable Energy Act

As important as forestry is the energy sector, which contributes some 70% of the country's GHG emissions. These emissions come from the burning of fossil fuels, mainly to generate electricity and to power internal combustion engines for transport.

The climate solution for the energy sector is simple: fast-track the transition to energy efficiency (EE) and renewable energy (RE). This solution can be justified not only for climate adaptation and mitigation reasons but for many other positive impacts on people's livelihoods, health and the environment.

Precisely for this reason, the country passed a law in 2008 that prioritizes the use and facilitates the deployment renewables, including solar, wind, hydro, biomass, geothermal and ocean/tidal energy. The Philippine Renewable Energy Act of 2008 was ten years old last year.

The RE Act featured five specific mechanisms to attain its goals. We have earlier critiqued these mechanisms one by one (CREST, 2018). The critique is echoed here:

### Feed-in-tariffs (FIT)

The original feed-in-tariff (FIT) system was implemented in Germany. It was so successful that it is credited for the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems by nearly two million German households today.

The German FIT design reduced the risk for lenders, encouraging commercial banks to extend loans for renewable energy projects. It did so by giving RE-generated electricity priority in dispatch (i.e., they are used first when several sources of electricity are available) and by fixing the rate at which the RE facility was paid by the transmission company. This gave RE projects a sure market and a regular cash flow.

FIT projects got no government subsidies. The German consumer paid for the premium price. Surveys have invariably shown that the German public was willing to pay more for renewables, because they wanted a nuclear phase-out. Over the years, a political consensus in Germany emerged around this matter. The consensus was sealed by the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear disasters.

When German households realized that they were actually going to earn money by putting up solar facilities and selling their output to the utilities, they did so in thousands, eventually in millions. The German FIT system succeeded well beyond expectations partly because it welcomed the participation of households, and the system made it very easy for them to join.

The Philippines adopted the FIT system through a provision in the Renewable Energy Act of 2008, but implementation took six years. The Department of Energy (DOE) issued the RE Act Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) in May 2009; the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) set the FIT rates (the amount paid to FIT projects, in pesos/kWh) in 2012 and the FIT Allowance (the amount collected from every consumer to pay the FIT projects, also in pesos/kWh) in 2014.

Unlike the German system, however, Philippine FIT rules excluded households and small players. FIT participants had to go through a byzantine bureaucratic maze to get a service contract with the DOE. In the process, they had to collect a few hundred required signatures.

Also, the Philippine version of the FIT had a fatal flaw: DOE set a maximum capacity of only 50 MW for the first batch of solar FIT applicants, and then made it a *race-to-finish*. All applicants had to build their solar projects first. (A small 10-MW solar project costs around P1 billion.) Those who finished earlier than the rest, within the 50-MW quota, got to enjoy the FIT benefits. Those who finished after the quota was filled were left holding an empty bag.

Low risk was the key to the success of the German FIT system. Amateur tinkering of a successful mechanism by DOE bureaucrats had turned a field-tested, low-risk system into an untried high-risk experiment.

In an effort to correct this flaw, the DOE subsequently launched a second round of FIT, where those who didn't make it in the first round could submit their entry for the next round. But the second round used the same high-risk, race-to-finish approach. Thus, it did not correct the fundamental flaw in the Philippine FIT system.

Worse, even those who made it under FIT have complained that they do not get paid on time. Delayed payments incur interest charges which are then passed on to consumers thru a higher FIT allowance in their electric bills. The incompetence of Philippine energy authorities has turned a successful model into a failed one.

Worst of all, instead of correcting their mistakes, energy authorities are now using their own failure as excuse to stop implementing FIT altogether, as Secretary Cusi announced in 2018. In the first three years of the Duterte administration, no FIT proposals were approved by the DOE.

So, in fact, FIT implementation, which started in 2014, had ended by 2016.

## Net metering

The original net metering program was first successfully implemented in the U.S., where it is credited for the rapid spread of rooftop solar in that country.

The U.S. net metering program was a very simple system. Small renewable systems—mostly solar—were allowed to directly connect to the grid, such that any excess electricity production went out to the grid, to be sold by the utility elsewhere. This outflow of power reversed the analog electric meter and automatically offset previous consumption by the solar facility.

Because the offsetting was done in kilowatt-hours, pricing was not an issue.

Net metering required no special meters or accounting procedures. All the system needed was an intelligent device (the industry calls it a “grid-tie inverter”) that would automatically synchronize with the grid the solar facility's output.

Unfortunately, U.S. utilities feared that net metering was becoming a threat to their monopolistic business model. Thus they started campaigning hard against it, fought to limit its adoption, and tried to turn it back where it had already gained traction.

When the net metering provision was included in the Philippine Renewable Energy Act, the utilities immediately took over its implementation. Contrary to the RE Act provision on net metering, they turned it into a net billing system, and that is how it is implemented today.

In a net metering system, when a solar kWh is offset by a utility kWh or vice versa, price does not come into the picture. It is the energy in kWh that cancels out. There are no ifs and buts about this: the RE Law, its IRR, and the ERC net metering rules all say that net-metered solar owners can only be charged the *net of their energy use*.

But in the net billing system implemented by Philippine utilities, contrary to the RE Act, a solar kWh is priced low – at average generation cost, which is roughly half the retail price – while a utility kWh is priced high, at retail price. The solar owners get the raw end of the deal.

Furthermore, the utilities also slapped their net metering customers with unnecessary fees and charges. Thus, the electric bill savings expected by the solar PV owner go to the utilities instead.

Ten years after the RE Act, the Philippines only has around 1,000 instead of hundreds of thousands, not to mention millions of net metering customers. A very poor showing indeed, reflecting the success of electric utilities in undermining the law to prevent the spread of rooftop solar.

## Renewable portfolio standards (RPS)

To reduce GHG emissions, we want to gradually decrease the percentage share of fossil fuels, and increase the percentage share of renewable energy in the electricity mix.

The RPS makes this mandatory. It involves setting a target, in terms of RE share in the electricity mix, that electric utilities must meet. If they do not meet the target, which increases every year, they will be subject to stiff penalties and other disincentives.

Ten years after the RE Act was passed, the DOE has not implemented RPS at all. It approved this year the implementing rules, but the standard proposed (one percentage point increase in RE share each year) is not enough to meet our country's commitment in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It will in fact increase, not decrease, our GHG emissions.

## Renewable energy certificates (RECs)

REC is a system that creates certificates corresponding to kilowatt-hours or megawatt-hours of renewable energy generated. These certificates can then be sold on a secondary market created by the RPS.



Who will buy the certificates? The buyers will be electric utilities who are unable to meet their RPS requirements. If a utility, for instance, manages to raise the RE share in its electricity by only 0.6% points in one year, while it is required by RPS rules to raise it by 1.0% points, then it can make up for the balance by buying enough RE certificates in the market to cover its 0.4% points shortfall.

Such a system will encourage utilities to use renewable energy to generate electricity because the RE certificates they get will enable them to earn additional income.

After ten years, RECs have not been implemented.

Even if the system is implemented, there is a fundamental flaw in the REC provision of the RE Act: it grants ownership of the certificate not to the entity which invested in creating that renewable electricity, but to the utility which bought it from the RE generator, although the utility may not have invested anything in generating it.

This provision must be amended, so that the RE certificates go to those who invested their money to set up a renewable facility.

## Green energy options

GEOP is another fine provision that empowers a consumer (anyone with an electric meter) to specify which generating company it wants to buy electricity from. Thus, an environmentally-conscious consumer can choose to buy electricity from a solar or a wind farm. The utility simply acts as the transport mechanism for the delivery of electricity. A price-conscious consumer can choose to buy electricity from the cheaper sources on the grid, which might well be a solar park too.

Giving consumers a choice is the essence of competition. Competition will force players in the electricity sector to become more efficient, to provide better services, and to cater to the real needs and intentions of consumers.

After ten years, GEOP has not been implemented.

A draft set of rules has been released by the DOE this year. However, the DOE draft limits GEOP participants to consumers with a demand of 100 kW or higher. Since a 1-kW air conditioner can serve one room, the draft GEOP rules only allow building with around 90 or more rooms to participate in the program, which excludes almost every ordinary household and small business.

Again, the non-implementation of GEOP is a big failure by the DOE.

## We need a better government that will face the climate crisis head-on

While the RE Act of 2008 was a milestone in promoting renewable energy in the Philippines, it has been seriously hobbled to such an extent that four of the five major mechanisms in the Act have not been implemented. The only mechanism that has been implemented, the FIT system,

was saddled with such serious flaws that it has not managed to install even a few gigawatts of renewable energy, after ten years. Its implementation has also been suspended for the past three years.

Today, the country's Climate Change Commission (CCC) is preparing a new document for the Paris climate agreement to be submitted in 2020 that significantly brings down its carbon-reduction commitment. From the original 70%, the new intended reduction ranges from a high 47.6% to a low 27.0% (CCC, 2019). A DOE director says we should expect something "way below 40%". Under such a commitment, we will continue to increase, rather than decrease, our carbon emissions. We will remain part of the problem, instead of the solution (Verzola, 2018).

In fact, coal does not really mean cheap electricity, with some electric utilities paying P6-8/kWh for coal-generated electricity, after fuel costs have been factored in. Government regulators and planners, it seems, continue to be captive to fossil-fuel interests.

In the next dozen years, we should be able to take full advantage of recent technological advances and price declines in distributed renewable energy, to bring reliable, affordable, and environmentally-benign electricity to all Filipinos. We can only do so if we have a government that proactively promotes renewables, not fossil fuels, and confronts the climate crisis head-on.

That is all the time we have, if we don't want the problems of global warming and climate change to completely overwhelm us.

## **Recommendations: solutions galore**

In fact, most of the solutions to the climate crisis are simple and, with sufficient political will, can be easily implemented.

**Forestry:** How hard is it to plant a tree? Mobilizing an entire population to do so, however, needs political will and significant funding. How hard is it to identify the illegal loggers? Their big trucks carrying huge logs and timber ply our highways and pass through military, police and DENR checkpoints regularly. Mobilizing the intelligence agencies to identify the big-time loggers and the enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute them still needs political will.

**Energy:** There are more than enough RE projects already approved, or queued up at the DOE for approval, to meet all our energy needs and also our international climate commitments, without building new fossil-fueled plants. But at the rate the DOE is approving coal-powered plants today, some of these fossil-based assets will eventually get stranded, unable to sell their output because electricity from the sun, wind or flowing water will become significantly cheaper. (See "Can the Philippine electricity sector reduce its carbon emissions by 70%?", *microRenewables Magazine*, Vol. 3, Issue 8, 2018.) If financing for solar rooftops were as common and accessible as financing for cars, laptops or cellphones, we can have thousands if not millions of solarized roofs in the next few years. Also, government should stop electric utilities from making it hard for households and businesses to solarize their rooftops.

**Building and industry:** The newly passed energy efficiency law will help the building and industry sectors improve their efficiency and reduce their carbon footprint. Beyond energy

efficiency, the concept of “upcycling” produces even better results, by redesigning production and consumption processes to support health and environmental goals from the beginning, while remaining competitive. The concept is explained in two books, *Cradle to Cradle* (McDonough & Braungart, 2002) and *The Upcycle* (McDonough & Braungart, 2013).

**Transport:** The solution to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the transport sector is forthcoming. The mainstreaming of electric vehicles (EV) will make the transportation industry an extension of the power industry. To the extent that we increase the RE share and decrease the fossil share in the electricity sector, the same low-carbon mix will stamp itself on the EV industry. This, plus a parallel program to phase-out antiquated internal combustion engines and block the entry of new ones will contribute in a major way to the reduction of GHG emissions in the transport sector. The government also needs to address concerns of marginalized sectors for a just transition to avoid resistance from transport workers and get wider public acceptance. Some countries have already expressed their intention to phase-out all fossil-fueled vehicles by mid-century.

**Waste:** In the waste sector, the solution is already stated clearly in the law, but hardly implemented: it is called segregation at source, so that the biodegradables may be composted, the recyclables may be repurposed and reused, and the residuals may be dealt with using special methods or stored temporarily until a technology is developed to deal with them.

**Agriculture:** Solutions involving the agriculture sector, even if not included among the Philippine commitments, are also important: organic farming trumps chemical farming in every respect, including climate adaptation and mitigation. Rice farming is supposed to be a major source of the greenhouse gas methane. But a rice-growing method called the system of rice intensification (SRI) is now becoming widely used, which uses less water and therefore produces little methane. At the same time, it also increases yields, reduces costs, and minimizes the use of toxic agrochemicals. Again, SRI is an excellent method for both adaptation and mitigation. Other climate friendly methods include permaculture, biodynamic farming, and natural farming.

## Conclusion

The Holocene was barely in its twelfth millennium when it was cut short by the Anthropocene. Most of our population now belong to the first generation born into the Anthropocene Epoch. But if we all do our share and engage in superhuman efforts to undo the damage we have done to our planetary home, we can make this new epoch a very brief blip in geological time.

The challenge is even greater for the youth, who are still in the process of choosing their lifetime careers. Will it be focused solely on business-as-usual careers, like fielding phoned-in questions in call centers, designing websites that maximize hits and clicks, marketing new high-tech corporate products, and hopefully becoming rich in the process? Or will it be a lifetime mission to end the Anthropocene?

The choices we all make, young and old alike, will henceforth determine the fate not only of our species, but of millions of other species with whom we share the Earth, our common home.

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## SDG 17

# Partnerships matter more if you know where you are and where you want to be

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Global partnerships through trade, debt, and aid all involving goods, services and financial flows play a significant role in resource-challenged developing countries such as the Philippines. To be primarily dependent on these externally-driven factors without first mapping out exactly where you want to go what industries to develop, incentives to create, food security policy to put in place -- would be like the “tail wagging the dog”.

This paper tries to provide a cursory look at the kind of partnerships that exists for the Philippines, the trends and opportunities, but nonetheless strongly argues that simply going with the flow will get us nowhere. There is no other way to go other than looking at your own capacity to mobilize domestic resources and strategizing so that partnerships that are there for the taking with other countries can be maximized. Otherwise, we shall be left with our own vulnerabilities which may be taken advantage of, as each country has its own national interest to pursue.



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## Resource Mobilization

Admittedly, compared to other countries, our revenue effort (ratio of tax and other government revenues to Gross Domestic Product or GDP) leaves much to be desired, but ironically, we have higher tax rates compared to our neighboring ASEAN countries. (See table 1 below<sup>1</sup>)

**Table 1. 2014 Comparative Revenue Effort vis-à-vis Tax Rates**

	2014 Revenue Effort (%)	Value Added Tax Rate (%)	Highest Individual Income Tax Rate (%)	Corporate Income Tax Rate (%)
Philippines	15.1	12	32	30
Malaysia	19.9	10	26	25
Singapore	18.5	7	20	17
Thailand	19.7	7	35	20
Cambodia	16.5	10		20
Vietnam	21.5	10	35	22
Indonesia		10		25
Asia-wide Ave.			28.4	22.5

The quick explanation to this seeming paradox lies in the many leakages in terms of exemptions from Value Added Tax (VAT) and grants of fiscal incentives such as income tax holidays to corporations operating in special economic zones. And while there were some improvement in the revenue effort the past years, these were marginal and not commensurate to the rate of economic growth.

The Duterte Administration attempted to address this through Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) 1, the first among five planned tax reform packages, which included the elimination of only a few VAT exemptions (no thanks to the strong lobby of interest groups), raising the tax rate on oil products and the lowering of individual income taxes.

Signed into law in December 2017, the full impact of TRAIN on revenue effort is yet to be seen. However, much of the inflationary pressures felt in 2018 up to the early part of 2019 was popularly attributed to TRAIN, more specifically, to the upward adjustment of taxes on oil products. As luck would have it, or bad timing too, inflationary pressures were also brought about by the rise in world crude oil prices, peso depreciation, coupled with the rise in the prices of rice and fish. Except for the rise in the imputed cost of transportation and gas expense in bringing these products to the market, which can be attributable to TRAIN, the

<sup>1</sup> Habito, C. F. (2017, February 10). Why does PH have a lower tax effort but higher tax rates? *Philippine Daily Inquirer*

main reasons for the rise in the prices of rice and fish though are mismanagement in the timing of rice importation and sheer depletion of marine resources.

The opportunity to use TRAIN 1 to evolve a more progressive tax system was diluted when attempts by the Executive to minimize the number of exemptions from VAT coverage was shot down by the Legislature. Reducing the exemptions while lowering the VAT rate from 12 to 10%, a level that approximates that of other ASEAN countries, while not part of the Executive's proposal, would have been very much welcomed by NGOs. And while tax rates were lowered on middle income brackets, still the brackets could have been more progressive.

Meanwhile, the removal of redundant subsidies, income tax holidays and other tax incentives on corporations was lumped in TRAIN 2, which legislators now wouldn't want to touch due to the public backlash against TRAIN 1.

Health advocates, on the other hand, welcomed the raising of taxes on cigarettes to fund the Universal Health Care program.

## Worrisome Trade Balance and Current Account Position

No less than government in its own zero draft of the SDG Voluntary National Review<sup>2</sup> admits that despite trade deals that were envisioned to facilitate the export of our goods to other countries while concomitantly bringing down to zero the tariffs on entry of imported goods, resulted in the following

- "... greater access has not translated to equitable growth in product exports, vis-à-vis product imports. **Importation of products has increased dramatically**, regardless of country trading partner;
- This could signify that local producers are not able to have greater access to the global market, and **even more alarming, have to face stiffer competition from foreign counterparts of their products**. While this competition is a welcome development for particular industries with marked market control, it could be damaging for smaller local industries.
- **Further disaggregation of trade balance by countries involved in multilateral trade agreements corroborates this trend of utilizing duty free zones for the purpose of importing goods far more than exporting products**. The starkest case for this trend is the trade balance with China, where a trade deficit of USD 227.81 million in 2014 has ballooned to USD 1,324.43 million in 2018." (emphasis by the author)

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<sup>2</sup> National Development Authority, Republic of the Philippines. (2019). The 2019 Voluntary *National Review of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Philippines [Draft]*



**Table 2. Percent of Tariff Lines with Imports at Zero Duty and Value of Imports**

Source Country	Free Trade Agreement	% of Tariff Lines with Imports at zero duty (2017)	Value of Imports (million USD) in 2017
Cambodia	ATIGA	3.26	15.00
China	ACFTA	76.01	14,868.00
India	AIFTA	41.03	87.00
Indonesia	ATIGA	39.17	6,724.00
Lao PDR	ATIGA	0.05	3.00
Malaysia	ATIGA	47.11	3,692.00
Myanmar	ATIGA	1.99	15.00
Thailand	ATIGA	48.94	6,604.00
Vietnam	ATIGA	32.10	2,490.00

Source: Tariff Commission

Abbreviations Note:

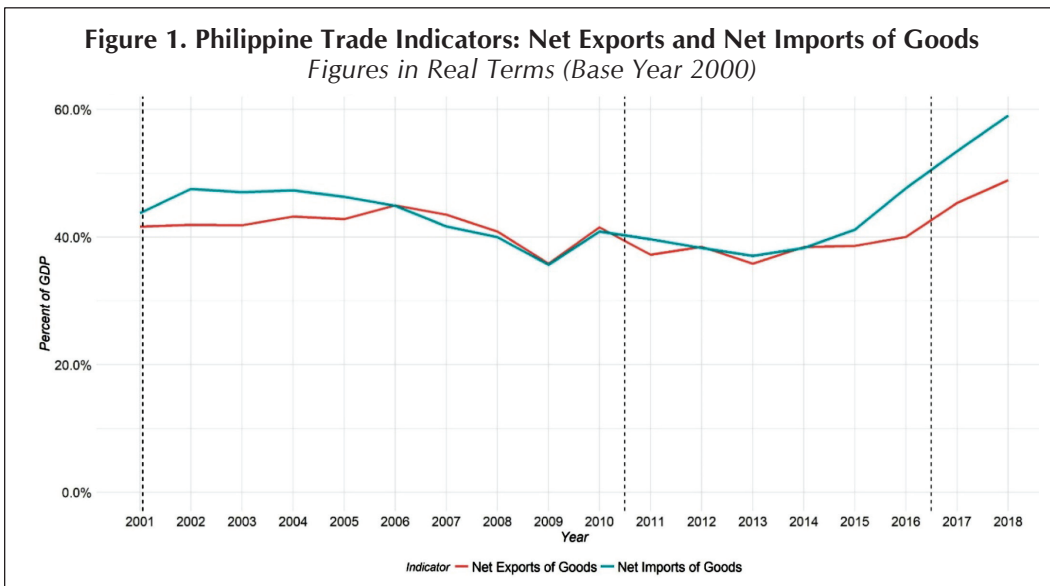
ATIGA – ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement

ACFTA – ASEAN-China Free Trade Area

AIFTA – ASEAN- India Free Trade Area

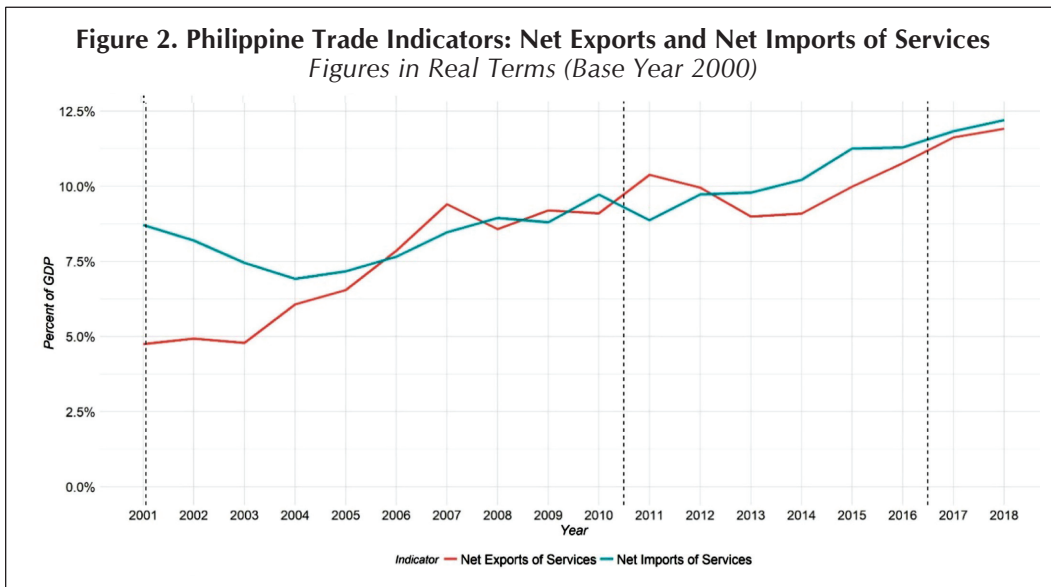
As can be gleaned from Table 2 above, China outdid all of the member ASEAN countries in terms of the proportion of tariff lines with zero duty as well as the value of imports of the Philippines from them in 2017.

From 2008 to 2014, there has been an improvement in the country’s trade position. However, after 2014 there was a deterioration of the country’s trade balance as the trend shows a widening gap between imports and export of goods. (See Figure 1)



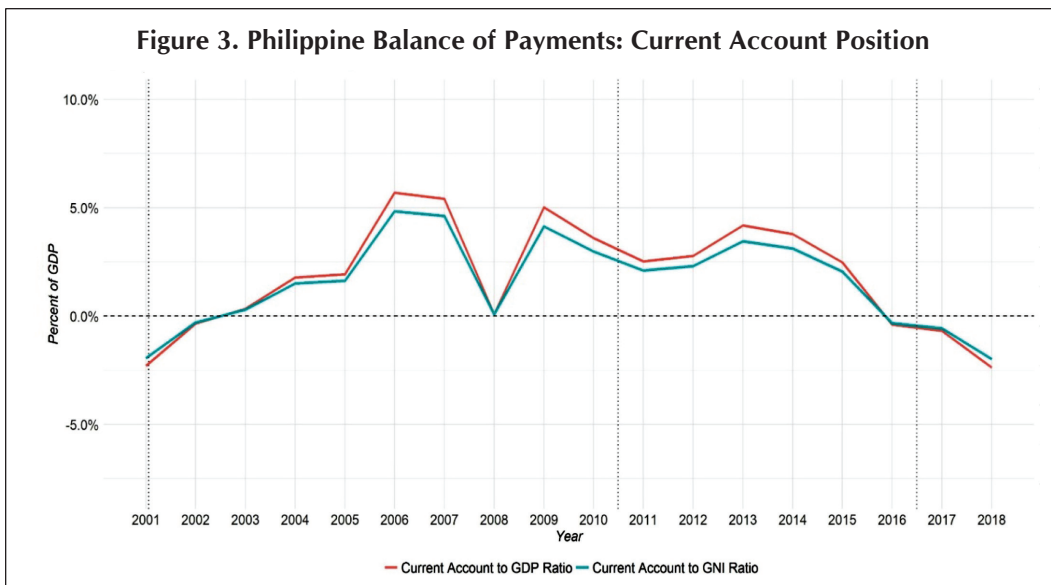
Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

In the past years export of services through BPOs and call centers have eased some pressures on our balance of payments position. Hopefully the upward trajectory will continue to catch up with the level of importation of services that the country does. (See Figure 2)



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

Needless to say, the trade deficits in both goods and services has resulted in the overall deterioration of our current account balance. (See Figure 3) It is no wonder then, that pressures on the peso has started to manifest with its depreciation vis-à-vis other foreign currencies.

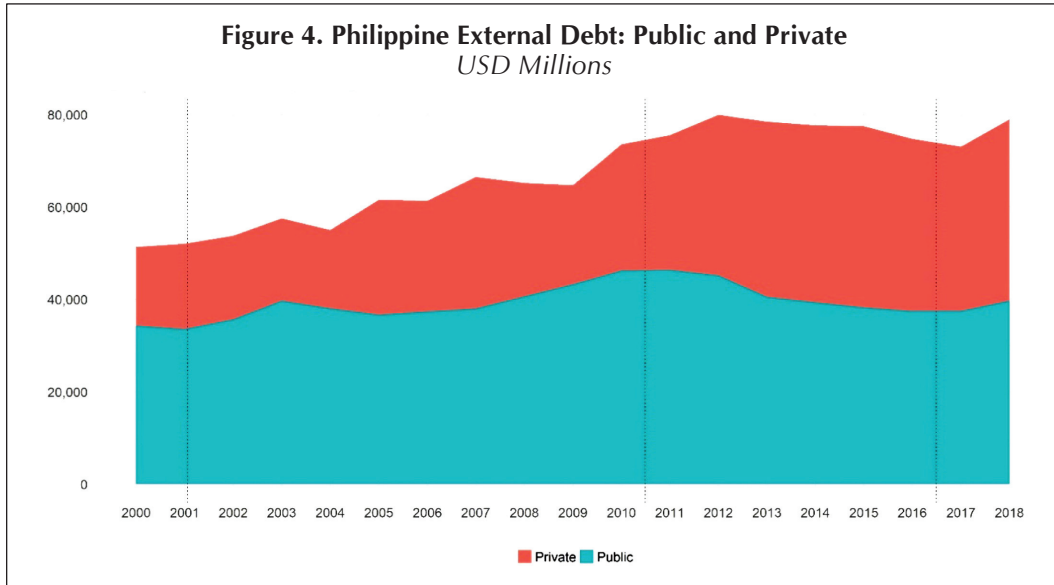


Source: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

Note: Data for years 2001-2004 are BPM5 Concept

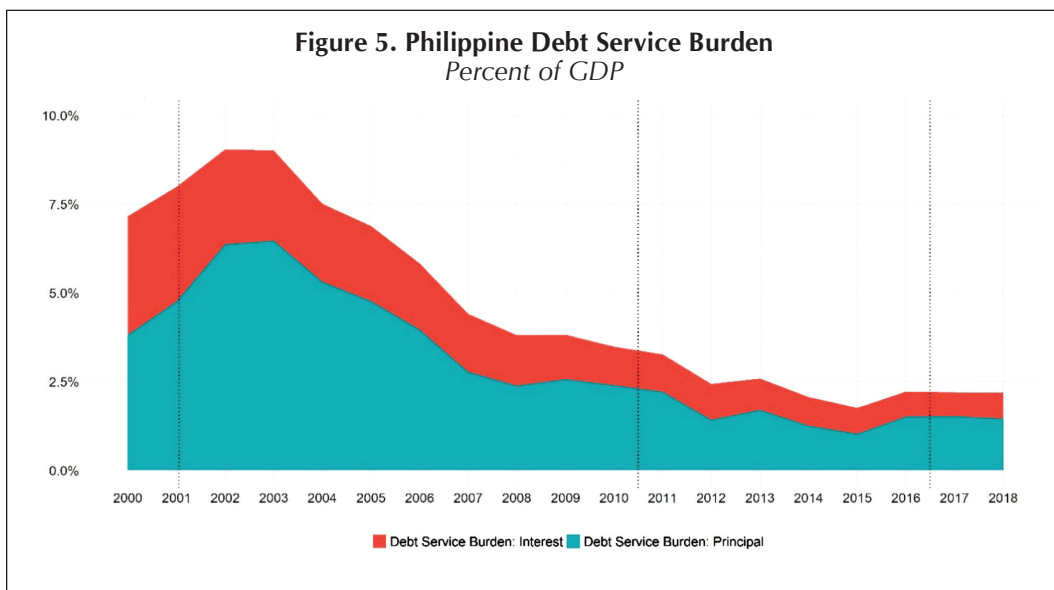
## Growing Debt Stock

When one continues to incur current account deficits, external borrowing is resorted to. Public and private sector borrowing has started to pick up again starting 2017. (See Figure 4)



Source: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

While the debt service burden looks manageable at the moment (see Figure 5), it may later on become untenable if we continue to finance our current account deficits with more borrowings.



Source: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

Debt service burden represents principal and interest payments after rescheduling

This precautionary note is buttressed by a recent report by the Philippine Daily Inquirer that that the government paid P53.8 billion of its debts last April compared to P23.2 billion in the same month in 2018 or almost double the amount. At least P4.4 billion went to the payment of foreign loans<sup>3</sup>.

## Tied Chinese Investments and ODA

The growth in imports and entry of foreign workers from China may perhaps be explained by the tied nature of investments and loans coming from them.

Unlike Western and other multilateral donors that typically require recipient states to adhere to international political norms, such as the ratification of human rights, fiscal austerity, bank secrecy laws, and environmental standards, a recent report by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism points out that “China’s official foreign aid (including grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans) does not necessarily meet the technical criteria of Western ODA. For instance, China’s concessional loans do not contain a big enough grant element to qualify as ODA. Specifically because China’s major financial institutions (banks and funds) are all state-backed, they often finance projects that serve the Chinese state’s political purposes.”<sup>4</sup>

During a Social Watch consultation early this year, the Freedom from Debt Coalition along with other CSOs raised several concerns with regard to the “features” of investments, loans and ODA from China<sup>5</sup>. These include the “special Investment Coordination Committee (ICC) approval process that allows Chinese support to pre-investment studies to be availed by Philippine government agencies, corporations and even local government units. To speed up the approval process, the ICC has a parallel agency in the Chinese government and in the Export-Import Bank of China.”

The case of the Chico Dam Agreement highlighted provisions that stipulate that it “shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of China,” and the venue of the dispute settlement should be in China.

The Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious project that aims to establish road, maritime and other infrastructure connectivity between people, goods and services of Europe and Asia bears watching especially because most of the country’s public-private partnership (PPP) projects will most likely be funded by China through this. The spectrum of reactions from skepticism to pragmatism are well founded. A major concern that keeps cropping up though are the lack of clear parameters, lack of transparency, absence of standard guidelines even on the mode of payment<sup>6</sup>. As such, CSOs must remain vigilant as projects after projects get negotiated.

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<sup>3</sup> de Vera, B. O. (2019, June 24). *Gov’t debt payments almost double to P53.8 billion in April*. Retrieved from Philippine Daily Inquirer

<sup>4</sup> Camba, A. A., Zhang, S. H., & (PCIJ), P. C. (2019, May 11). *The ABC’s of Chinese state-backed finance, foreign direct investments*. Retrieved from ABS-CBN News

<sup>5</sup> Social Watch Philippines. (2019, February 7-8). *Towards Coherent Policies for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Philippines: Consultation Proceedings of the Civil Society for the 2019 Voluntary National Review*. Retrieved from Social Watch Philippines web site

<sup>6</sup> Estrada, D. V. (2018, March). *China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Implications for the Philippines*. Retrieved from Foreign Service Institute, Republic of the Philippines web site

## ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS (IFFs)

IFFs are broader in scope than capital flight. They include trade mispricing, bulk cash movements, informal *hawala* transactions, smuggling and laundering drug money.

The Anti Money Laundering Council released a report that covers January 2013 to December 2017 on the Philippine exposure to illicit finance<sup>7</sup>. A total of 161,650 STRs (Suspicious Transaction Reports) involving international remittances and domestic CASA (Current Account Savings Account) transactions (21.40% of the total STR population), with an aggregate amount of PHP 17.895 trillion, were covered in the study. Some of its key findings are:

- The Philippines has become a source country of illicit funds generated from smuggling.
- The Philippines has become the destination of illicit funding from the following unlawful activities: (1) Violation of environmental laws;(2) Illegal trafficking of persons;(3) Kidnapping for ransom; and (4) Terrorism and conspiracy to commit terrorism.
- For the illicit funds generated from other predicate offenses not mentioned in the foregoing items, majority of the said proceeds are only circulating within the Philippine Financial System.
- With regard to Suspicious Transactions Report volume, the United States of America posed the highest threat for both inflows and outflows of all predicate crimes under review. In terms of peso amount, majority of the incoming criminal proceeds were coursed through various banks in the United Kingdom, while large amounts of outgoing illicit funds were mostly sent to Hong Kong.

The report though does not yet include trade mis-invoicing or misdeclaration otherwise known as “technical smuggling”. Likewise, as it covers only recent years, no mention was made with regard to the Marcos wealth which is a major outflow of funds which held back the growth and development of the country for at least two decades.

There’s a lot of room for inter-country cooperation to curb IFFs, which some cynics would even conjure as having the ability to make or break national elections. Recommendations on this will be discussed as we wind up to our conclusion.

## Things we would like to see forward

**Resource Mobilization.** The recent victory of local governments to now include tariffs, travel taxes and other externally generated government revenues to the base figure for determining their internal revenue allotment (IRA) would spell less resources for the national government but with more going to local governments. Federalism might no longer be needed as the major impetus for greater financing going to local governments. However, we must ensure greater transparency in the use of these funds and increased participatory mechanisms so that people’s organizations, especially the poor and marginalized would have a voice on the fund’s allocation

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<sup>3</sup> Anti-Money Laundering Council, Republic of the Philippines. (2019, May). *A Risk Assessment on the Philippines’ Exposure to External Threat based on Submitted Suspicious Transaction Reports*. Retrieved from Anti-Money Laundering Council web site

and utilization. Further, there is a lot of potential for local governments to actually generate their own resources instead of being too dependent on IRA, such as reviewing their property taxes, imposing environmental fees and other tourism-related tax measures. Nonetheless, a lot needs to be done by the national government to improve its revenue effort, and more importantly, evolve a more progressive tax structure.

**Industrial Policy.** This should actually be at the top of our list as government tries to rationalize fiscal incentives (as it has been trying to decades back) to get rid of free loader investors in special economic zones. But apart from easing the fiscal burden of government, an industrial policy will guide policy makers as to which direction this country should move so that incentives go to the right industries. Free market ideologues would definitely shun the idea of picking winners and losers but trade relations should be guided too by an industrial policy. Bringing down tariffs to zero in most commodity lines just because we have trade agreements with certain countries is not the way to go. Our trade and current account deficits will soon become unsustainable once more, which would trigger a ballooning debt stock. Bottomline: we must know what we want and how to get there.

## **Illicit Financial Flows**

There is need for greater inter-country transparency with regard to the pricing of goods produced domestically and later on exported. This is to lessen, if not totally prevent technical smuggling.

Base erosion, profit shifting or transfer pricing, a practice of multinational corporations of under-declaring profits in jurisdictions with higher tax rates and declaring the profits instead in its subsidiary or sister company located in countries with lower tax rates (tax havens) is a the gray area of tax avoidance. CSOs have been arguing to consider these as IFFs and be included when quantifying the extent of IFFs. This is another area where country-by-country reporting, and automatic exchange of information is relevant.

The next UN High Level Convention should negotiate and agree on an international convention on financial transparency, as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has recommended.

Finally, and this is outside the ambit of global partnerships but perhaps can be made a conditionality for all loans and ODA agreements: that access should take place only if the country lifts its Bank Secrecy Law starting with accounts held by government officials.

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# Strengthening Commitment to End Violence Against Children through the Sustainable Development Goals

Save the Children Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as adopted in 2015 by all the Member States of the United Nations General Assembly provides a blueprint for global peace and prosperity. It outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve a better and sustainable future for all. It addresses global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. It targets that each Goal must be achieved by 2030 and that no one will be left behind.

For Save the Children Philippines, an important element in the 2030 Agenda is the visibility of children in the language of the UN Resolution on the SDGs. This means focusing on targets for children, specifically on eliminating violence against children. In 2015, Save the Children drafted a sectoral report on specific SDG targets for children. The report highlights the progress on the child-focused targets for the SDGs, the obstacles to achieving these targets, and recommendations to ensure that the targets are being delivered to, and directly benefiting, children.

As a follow up to the baseline spotlight report, Save the Children Philippines once again looked into the status and progress of child-related SDGs on violence against children, specifically 4,



5, 8, 11 and 16. This is part of the organization's contribution to the 2019 Spotlight Report of Philippine civil society organizations (CSOs) that have banded together to highlight the sector's perspective on the actual progress being made in key indicators involving them. The process also included gathering 28 girls and boys from different parts of the country to hear their voice on the issues relating to them in the SDGs. The children learned about the 17 goals and shared their experiences and views on how the SDGs are being addressed in their homes, schools, and communities. They also discussed issues related to the SDGs that they feel most passionate about, identified those that they think should be prioritized, and came up with their recommendations on what the government should do to improve the situation of children in the country. The children formulated messages that they want to convey to the government in relation to the SDG reporting this year. However, this report only highlights status and propositions for SDGs 4, 8 and 16, which are 3 of the 6 priority SDGs for reporting this year in the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July.

## **SDG 4: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS**

SDG 4, along with five other goals, are being reviewed by the HLPF in New York. SDG 4 covers seven targets and 3 means of implementation -- one of which focuses on the provision of safe and non-violent learning environments for all to ensure that all children and adolescents are able to fulfil their right to inclusive, quality education. The critical issues falling within SDG 4 are highlighted in this section.

### **Trends and Analysis**

Numerous studies have proven that unsafe learning environments reduce the quality of education for all learners due to increased risk of anxiety, psychological stress, and depression. Negative stressors such as these can cause decrease in the students' motivation and learning performance, which were linked to less participation in class or eventually to dropping out of school. It is therefore critical that institutions prioritize achieving excellent curriculum, an inclusive learning environment, and safety for all students.

In the Philippines, The Department of Education (DepEd) is tasked to provide for the basic education needs of every child. Their task is gargantuan; for School Year (SY) 2017-2018 alone, DepEd served around 2.27 million kindergarten, 143.48 million elementary, 7.82 million junior high school, and 2.78 million senior high school learners. The National Baseline Study on Violence against Children (NBSVAC)<sup>1</sup> reveals that 14% of these learners, or around 21.89 million learners, will experience some form of violence or abuse. The NBSVAC notes that of the students who have experienced violence in schools, half experienced sexual violence.

To address issues and cases of abuse at the school level, DepEd issued a number of policies to improve the quality of Filipino children's learning environment. These include Department Order (DO) 40, Series of 2012, or the DepEd Child Protection Policy, which requires all public and private elementary and secondary schools to create their own Child Protection Committee and provides guidelines to address incidence of child abuse, exploitation, bullying and other

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF and Council for the Welfare of Children (October 2016) National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children: Philippines. Manila: Council for the Welfare of Children and UNICEF Philippines..

forms of abuse. The DepEd also issued the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act 10627, or the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, which provides more explicit rules on addressing bullying and cyber-bullying. This was reiterated through the DepEd Memorandum Circular No. 5, Series of 2017. In September 2018, DepEd issued DO 43. S. 2018 providing guidelines on the release, use, reporting and monitoring and evaluation of Fiscal Year 2018 child protection program funds, specifically appropriated for Training on Positive Discipline in Everyday Teaching and/or Training-Seminar. These policies are critical steps to address violence in schools and is observed to have resulted in substantial decrease in reported incidents of violence in schools. Based on the reports from the Office of the Undersecretary of Legal Affairs, the cases of bullying have decreased from 32,129 cases in SY 2015-2016, to 22,059 cases in SY 2016-2017. Also, the number of reported child abuse cases has significantly dropped from 7,767 in 2016 to 2,460 cases in 2017.

However, anecdotal data show that violence continues to prevail in schools. Consultations and interviews with children reveal that LGBTQ+ children<sup>2</sup> are frequent victims of bullying in school. A children's consultation on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identify and Expression (SOGIE) held in 2015<sup>3</sup> revealed that LGBTQ+ children experience bullying from their classmates on a daily basis because of their sexual orientation. LGBTQ+ children themselves raised the issue of harassment and abuses they encounter for being "different." The most common form of harassment they experience is bullying. Incidents of verbal bullying is rampant, which sometimes escalates to physical assault and extortion. Aside from bullying, the child participants reported incidents of verbal and/or physical abuse from family members. During the focus group discussions (FGDs), ten cases of oppressive behaviour from family were reported. In most of these cases, family members indulged in verbal abuse, hurling discriminatory statements at the children regarding their gender expression and sexuality. Studies that looked into the situation of children in urban relocation sites also affirmed the experiences shared in the consultation, with children reporting that they were being discriminated against and being physically attacked by their classmates and neighbor<sup>4</sup>.

Incidents of violence and abuse in schools have also been reported in mainstream media and often land as trending news in social media, raising the possibility that a lot of cases remain undetected and unreported through formal channels. Although some of the data on incidences of abuse and bullying are available at the DepEd's Office of the Undersecretary for Legal Affairs, there are no published official reports on the status or state of violence and abuse in school settings, nor was this included in DepEd's over-all annual reports. There is also limited or insufficient data on the specific progress of Child Protection indicators after the roll-out of the Child Protection Policy.

The seeming low number of reported cases also raises questions on the functionality of child protection reporting and referral mechanisms in schools. In a research conducted by SCP, the

<sup>2</sup> Children identifying as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning), growing up in households with LGBTQ parents, or even perceived to be, are subject to many forms of discrimination in most countries around the world.

<sup>3</sup> ASEAN SOGIE Caucus and Civil Society Coalition on the Rights of the Child. Bata at ang Bahaghari: Children's Workshop on the Rights of LGBT Children. Documentation report. Consultation conducted on April 20-21, 2016 at the University Hotel, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City.

<sup>4</sup> Save the Children Philippines and Institute of Philippine Culture (2015) "Urban Resettlement of Filipino Informal Settler Families and Children: Roots, Dynamics, Impacts." Unpublished study, April 2018; Save the Children Philippines and John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues. "Securing the Rights of Girls and Boys in Urban Poor Relocation Programs." Unpublished research.

DepEd Office of the Undersecretary for Legal Affairs shared reports that, for SY 2016-2017, only 21.5% (9,912) of the 46,000 public schools have established child protection committees. Of this number, 89% have child protection policy and code of conduct in place. To date, DepEd is still in the process of collecting more information since not all Regional Offices have submitted a report. There are no official published reports that are publicly available whether printed or online. According to DepEd, more than a thousand department personnel were trained to build the capacity of teachers on the fundamentals of child protection in 2015. However, there is no available data on the number of teachers oriented on and capacitated to implement the DepEd Child Protection Program.

The continuing efforts of the DepEd to address issues of violence and abuse in schools is noteworthy. However, this positive trend is threatened by measures that will potentially intensify bullying in schools with the proposal to bring back the Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC) for military training in senior high school. The President's veto of the Positive Discipline Act already passed by both houses of Congress, has undermined the promotion of positive discipline in schools. The veto could further abet the cultural belief that underlies the justification of corporal punishment.

## Key challenges

Reporting incidents of abuse is one of the challenges in addressing cases of abuse and violence. According to then DepEd Undersecretary for Legal Affairs in 2015, "One of the biggest challenges in addressing child abuse is the reporting itself or the child coming out to report the abuse that he or she experiences." The absence of accurate and reliable data and public reports pose another challenge in monitoring the status of child protection and state of violence and abuse in schools. This hinders the development and provision of programs, policies and actions to address the issue and to ensure a safe and learning environment for the attainment of quality inclusive education. The implementation of the DepEd DO No. 40 should be intensified to increase the number of schools with a functional child protection committee and have child protection policies in place.

## Proposed solutions and policy recommendations

- Strengthen DepEd's data collection and monitoring systems to effectively track reports of child protection issues.
- Improve training/capacity building of DepEd staff and personnel, and include these information in its annual accomplishment report.
- Adopt/ include modules on child protection (including psychological first aid) and positive discipline in DepEd's in-service training program for teachers and school administrators.
- Adopt clear guidance and support for schools in establishing and making child protection committees functional and in enforcing the child protection policy.
- Strengthen coordination with the barangay (village) mechanisms—such as the barangay councils for the protection of children and the women and children desks— to ensure that reported cases are addressed.

## Children's Propositions

- Improve teacher classroom management and teaching skills by providing them more training and motivation to do their job
- Lessen teacher discrimination and favoritism, especially giving focus only on academic performers
- Put in place an accountability mechanism amongst and between the schools, NGOs and local governments to help monitor the progress of improving quality education in local areas
- Increase inclusiveness in Supreme Student/Pupil Government and ensure they serve as mechanism for genuine children's participation in schools.
- Strengthen child participation mechanisms in the Department of Education and related agencies.
- Conduct Child and LGBTIQ+ rights awareness seminars for teachers, parents, and barangay officials.



***“We hope the government will invest on improving teacher’s skills because in some of our schools, the teachers let the children do the studying by ourselves. For example, they make us copy whole textbooks to our notebooks. Or they will ask us to make test questions, which we will answer ourselves.”***

*– Jasmine, 16 years old*



## SDG 8: PROTECTING CHILDREN IN HARMFUL WORK

In 2017, the International Labor Organization made a bold pronouncement that the progress on SDG 8.7, which focuses on addressing child labor, is considerably behind. Unless drastic measures are taken, a world without modern day slavery and child labor will remain a vision beyond 2030. A similar picture can be found in the Philippines where a large number of children are still engaged in the worst forms of child labor, such as child soldiers in armed conflict and trafficked victims in commercial sexual exploitation. It is not surprising since the Philippines has registered a poverty incidence at 21% in 2018<sup>5</sup>, which means 2 out of 10 Filipinos have barely enough resources to meet their daily needs. During consultations with children on why they believe children want to work, they cited a host of reasons: that it is a necessity for some so that they can supplement their funds for their school needs, that they help their parents provide for the family, that there is an increasing number of early pregnancies, and that they need to support a young family of their own<sup>6</sup>.

### Trends and Analysis on Child Labor

In a survey conducted by the National Statistics Office and the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2011<sup>7</sup>, data on Child Labor shows there were 3.3 Million children at the time, or 12.4% of the estimated 26.617 million children aged between 5 to 17 years in the Philippines, who were engaged in child labor. It must be noted that this number does not account for the number of children who work in secret due to being trafficked, forced and bonded to do labor, engaged in commercial sexual exploitation, and other illicit activities.

Meanwhile, from the children's perspective during the Children's Consultation on the SDGs, they raised three key points which they believe forces a child to work:

- Children are becoming parents – Based on their experience, their peers are forced to work because they are becoming parents themselves with an urgent need to provide for their own family. They really believe that the rising cases of early pregnancy and unprepared parenthood is a perpetuating element of poverty.
- Parents do not have stable jobs – This is the more common response coming from

“As a child, I have worked as a farmer because of poverty. I think children face risks and dangers when they work in the farm, such as risk of skin cancer because of extended hours under the heat of the sun, snake bites, falling off ladders and getting hacked while using a machete [when doing land clearing or harvesting]. Many of us choose to work over studying because of poverty.”

*Quoted from the Children Talk to Children About the UNCRC (C2C), Children's Alternative Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 2018.*

children when asked about what forces a child to work. They have cited that a lot of Filipinos only have contractual jobs which they are allowed to hold for only 6 months or

<sup>5</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority, Reference No.2019-053

<sup>6</sup> Save the Children Philippines. Report on the Highlights of the Children's Consultation on the SDGs held last May 28-29, 2019 in Quezon City, Philippines.

<sup>7</sup> Survey on Children: Child Labour in the Philippines, NSO in partnership with ILO, 2011

so, regardless of performance. This is not a helpful mechanism for struggling Filipinos, and in fact, only bolsters the gap between them and the rich people who profit from this labor malpractice.

- Community influences child labor – This reinforces the theory mentioned above that some communities actually expect children to work after reaching a certain age, but usually within the context of farming or fishing communities. The poorest regions of the country have more incentive to force a child to work so that daily needs of the family are met, instead of making children pursue their education of which the benefits are still in the unknown future.

## Key challenges

The data acquired on child labor are mainly sourced from the 2011 Survey on Children conducted by the PSA, indicating that the government and civil society sector are using outdated information. The available data have also not been able to establish the number of children trafficked for work, forced and bonded child labor, commercial sexual exploitation of children and use of children for illicit activities and armed conflict. It shows, however, there are 3,312,000 estimated number of children aged 5 to 17 years who worked for at least one hour during the past week in October 2011. Of this number, 66.7% of males and 55% of the female children work in hazardous situations.

## Proposed solutions and policy recommendations

For the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) in partnership with the Philippine Statistics office and strategic CSOs to lead the conduct of an updated situational analysis/research on child labor.

## Children's Propositions

- Improvement of majority of government services including, but not limited to, access to quality education, providing more sources of livelihood, justice that does not discriminate against the poor and access to health services in far-flung areas.
- Improved tax collection, funds utilization and policy implementation to fund improvements and ensure sustainability of government services and programs
- The government has already passed a lot of laws, but they are not implemented well. There should be a group who will be tasked to review these laws and monitor the implementation.



## Children's recommendations to the government to address child labor

- Ensure children's continuous access to education and increase opportunities for working children to go back to school. If needed, provide scholarship and support for children's education because dropping out of school is both a cause and effect of child labor.
- Develop livelihood programs for parents, which will allow them to earn enough to meet the basic needs of the family.
- Strictly implement laws against child labor, including programs to educate the public on the negative effects of child labor on children; support poor families and monitor incidences of child labor.

*Children Talk to Children About the UNCRC (C2C), Children's Alternative Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 2018.*



## **SDG 16: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN THROUGH PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**

A truly sustainable development cannot take place without peace, stability, human rights and effective governance based on the rule of law. For all the purported benefits of globalization, it does not seem to have stopped the increasing divide amongst nations and people. There are some who would claim this is inevitable --- a human flaw ingrained in our DNA. However, this endless cycle of violence and conflict must be addressed if we will have any chance in surviving as a people. High levels of armed conflict have a destructive impact on a country's development, affecting economic growth and often resulting in long-standing grievances among communities that can last for generations. Situations of conflict in countries and where rule of law is weak can give rise to prevalence of sexual violence, crime, exploitation and torture. Governments must take the necessary measures to protect those most at risk. Arguably, the last three years can be chalked up as challenging years for the Philippines in attaining peace and justice. Our country has become a global headliner for what others claim as flagrant disregard for human rights.

### **Trends and status analysis**

In the first 18 months of President Rodrigo Duterte's term in July 2016 alone, there have been at least 74 cases of documented child executions in the Philippines related to the government's anti-illegal drugs campaign (popularly known as "Operation Tokhang"<sup>8</sup>). Moreover, an official of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) estimated that at least 18,000 children have been orphaned as a result of the killings under the government's war on drugs. The government has not released any official data on detained children in the context of anti-illegal drugs campaign. This does not mean however that this does not exist. According to an NGO report to the United Nations in 2018<sup>9</sup>, 385 children were registered from January to June 2018 in three holding centers for children: Bahay Pag-Asa in Caloocan City (the former Yakap Bata Holding Center), Malabon Bahay Sandigan, and Valenzuela Bahay Pag-Asa. It was established that 19.4 % of the children in these holding centers were accused of heinous crimes, and of these 14.8 % were accused of drug-related crimes.

The same study documented the views and experiences of children whose families were affected by Operation Tokhang<sup>6</sup>, including the following:

- Trauma on children who witnessed the killings, especially the killing of their parents
- Economic difficulties faced by the families whose breadwinners were killed
- Bullying and harassment of the orphaned children at schools, which are affecting their educational performance
- Eventual dropping out of school due to financial reasons
- Perceived changes in the behavior of children according to their parents: displays of verbal and physical aggression

<sup>8</sup> Operation Tokhang is short for the governments Operation Plan TuktokHangyo. The word "Tokhang" comes from the combination of Visayan words Tuktok (knock) and Hangyo (Pleading/persuade). In Davao City where it was first implemented, the operation involves police personnel accompanied by local officials of the barangays or towns going from house to house of suspected drug addicts and drug pushers to persuade and warn them to stop their illegal activities and offer drug rehabilitation and livelihood programs to be shouldered by the city government if they opt to avail of them.

<sup>9</sup> Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) (2018), Follow-up Report to the Concluding Observations of the Committee against Torture on the Philippines' Third Periodic Report.

## Other Forms of Violence

According to the NBSVAC, there is little variation in experiences of violence among children between socio-economic classes or between those based in rural and urban areas. However, differences among sexes were noted. Boys are more likely to experience violence than girls, but the total prevalence are high in both (81.5% for boys and 78.4% for girls). Violence at home are more likely to affect girls, but more serious violence are inflicted on boys in the belief that boys need more disciplining. The most common perpetrators of physical violence at home were people they know, and trust--mothers, fathers and siblings. There seems to be an inverse correlation between the parents' level of education to the tendency to utilize corporal punishment. Other drivers of violence at home include social and cultural norms on discipline and the choice of using the authoritarian style of parenting.

**Fast Facts on VAC\***

**1 out of 5 children** suffers from sexual abuse at home, in school and in the community  
Results of this study\* show that 17.1% of children aged 13-18 experience sexual violence in any setting.

2 out of 5 children commit a form of physical violence with their peers

4 out of 10 children grow up seeing some form of physical violence at home.

6 out of 10 children are physically and psychologically abused.

7 out of 10 children do not avail of local children's protection systems in their community

**8 out of 10 LGBT children** are physically and psychologically abused

10% of children are physically neglected by their parents or guardians.

\*Based on the Philippines National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children, 2016




It does not help that the Positive and Non-Violent Discipline of Children Act, a consolidated version of Senate Bill No. 1477 and House Bill No. 8239, and a product of the 17th Congress, was vetoed by President Rodrigo Duterte in early 2019. The President's veto statement cited the following reasons:

- The President's belief of the effectiveness of corporal punishment in disciplining children,
- The bill would be a violation of the privacy of the family and its sanctity, and
- Western trends on abolishing corporal punishment may not be applicable in Philippine culture.

Psychological violence is also prevalent within Filipino families with 59.2% of the respondents of the survey reporting they had been subjected to psychological violence during childhood. They cited being put down, shaming and rejection as the most common forms of abuse. In the same survey, 7.1% of children aged 13-17 reported that they had experienced sexual violence during their childhood. There are notably more males (24.7%) than females (18.2%) who experienced sexual violence. Factors cited as contributory to the prevalence of sexual violence include:

- Lack of supervision
- Single-headed households
- Presence of a stepfather
- Domestic violence

- Absence of both parents from the home
- Limited access to information on protection and prevention of sexual violence because of cultural taboos in relation to discussion of sexuality and reproductive health
- Lack of effective implementation of domestic legislation (e.g. minimum age of sexual consent)
- Increased possession and rates of use of smartphones and dating apps have resulted in greater opportunities for sexual violence

The NBSVAC data show that violence against children, whether physical, sexual or psychological, remains prevalent in Philippine society. Economic and cultural factors, as well as dynamics in families, schools and communities, must be taken into consideration to understand this issue further. Furthermore, new forms of violence, like peer-related violence and cyber-mediated violence, are also other areas of concern.

Killing of children has also transpired in the last five years. Forty children were killed (28 boys and 11 girls with one child of unknown gender); and 76 were injured (40 boys, 34 girls and 2 of unknown gender in incidents involving targeted shootings, crossfire, airstrikes, shelling, indiscriminate attacks, summary executions, unexploded ordinance and/or the mistreatment of children during detention. Almost half of all child casualties were attributed to either the AFP (30 child casualties) or the Abu Sayyaf Group (24 child casualties). Most of those cases were crossfire incidents between the AFP and armed groups. Other data on the killing and maiming of children are in the context of the armed conflict in Mindanao. While knowing the full extent of such violations may be limited, it is expected that these cases will continue as armed conflict continues in Mindanao.

Another alarming trend is the recruitment of children in armed conflict which has been steadily increasing especially in the southern regions of the country. In 2018, the Annual Report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, verified the recruitment and use of 30 children (6 girls, 8 boys, 16 sex unknown) by armed groups. 16 children were used as human shields by Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in a single incident; 6 were recruited and used by New People's Army (NPA); and 8 by the Maute Group. Children were recruited and used for combat, as part of medical squads, as cooks and to extract gunpowder from firecrackers. The UN received additional unverified reports of the large-scale recruitment and use of children by the Maute Group during the Marawi siege and of nine children recruited by NPA, indicating that the actual number of violations is likely higher. Some of the children were reportedly killed in combat. It documented the detention of 12 children for their alleged association with armed groups, none of whom were formally charged. For example, four boys were arrested and detained by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for their alleged association with the Abu Sayaff Group. The boys were blindfolded, handcuffed and beaten during their detention and subsequently taken to a hospital for medical treatment. In addition, as proof of their involvement, a total of 1,859 children have been disengaged from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) ranks following their de-listing from the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in 2017.

This dangerous trend of utilizing child soldiers is a blatant disregard of the adults' responsibility to protect children from the ill-effects of war. This trend may have cultural roots since in some regions of the country, there are still communities who believe there is nothing wrong in making

a teenaged child do adult's work, indiscriminate of the hazards. However, since the country is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child the Philippine government must seek to reverse this trend---both in the recruitment of children to rebel groups and the resulting treatment of government agencies of children rescued from armed conflict situations.

In terms of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), there is a low percentage of CICL cases relative to the total crime volume in the Philippines. In 2016, the total recorded cases involving CICL was 14,387, decreasing to 11,324 by 2018. Nevertheless, this may not be enough to stop the passage of a proposed law lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 years old. The top five incidents involving children are theft, rape, physical injuries, robbery and prohibited drugs.

## Key challenges

Despite a relatively strong legal and policy framework protecting children from violence, which recently included protection of children in conflict situation, there are also measures which take the country's progress two steps backward. While the anti-illegal drug campaign has challenged the fulfillment of children's rights, there is still a huge gap in knowing the extent of its effects, starting from the cases of killings up to the situation of the children of the killed victims. Although there have been 74 cases of children killed in relation to the anti-illegal drug campaign that an NGO has documented, the details of these cases could not be shared even with the government for security reasons. There are also no current updates on the situation of the orphaned children, child surrenderees as part of the government's anti-illegal drugs campaign and detained children. Knowing the full extent of the rights violations against children will need further researches on a national level as well as case studies for in-depth analysis. The absence of data or information on the magnitude and details of these cases also hinder the identification, designing and implementation of responsive and appropriate interventions and services for these children affected by Operation Tokhang.

The same lack of information plagues the efforts in understanding the effects of violence against children in general. As of 2019, Social Watch Philippines shared that the government has not allocated any budget for the regular conduct of the NBSVAC for 2020, and that SDG 16.2 remains to be one of the indicators the government has not prioritized for monitoring. These will certainly make it difficult to monitor if any progress is being made at all for this particular indicator.

## Proposed solutions and policy recommendations

- Pass a national law prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in all settings including in the home (vetoed by the President in 2019). This proposition was endorsed by the children during the SGD consultation conducted by SCP.
- Issue guidelines through a Memorandum Circular by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to all regional and local DILG offices and local government units at provincial, city, municipal and barangay levels for the localization of the Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence Against Children.
- Allocate resources of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Justice and the Council for the Welfare of Children to fast-track the setting up and maintenance of a comprehensive information management system to manage data on violence against children
- Amend the Anti-child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act (Republic Act 7610) to address existing legislative gaps, strengthen the mandates and improve resources for inter-agency coordination structures, strengthen information systems and capacity building programs, and secure budget allocation for child protection programs.
- As proposed in SDG 4, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) should lead the conduct of a situational analysis/research on children in situations of armed conflict as an initial step towards implementing the RA 11888. This also includes the development and implementation of a comprehensive program on the protection of children in situations of armed conflict, and prioritize its rollout at the local level.

## Children's Propositions

- The government should ensure full implementation and proper monitoring of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2016
- Children should be consulted about changes in laws affecting them (like the lowering of the criminal age of responsibility) because they are the ones who experience and understand it.
- The government should conduct orientation sessions on proper parenthood (Family Planning)
- The government should give orientation sessions about why the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) should not be lowered, and they should maximize the use of media, including social platforms, TV, radio and newspaper to disseminate accurate information about this matter
- The local government, especially barangays, should monitor their own communities (be socially accountable)
- Child and LGBTIQ+ rights seminars for teachers, parents, and barangay officials





***“There are so many wrong assumptions about Positive Discipline. They say, the child’s head will be filled with dangerous notions increasing the chances of them growing up to be criminals. That is not true. We wanted to change the adults’ perspective but we were not given the chance to do so. How can we recommend a solution if you haven’t given us a chance to help improve children’s situation at home by implementing positive discipline?”***

– Lanie, 17 years old

### **Other Quotes from the Children’s Consultation**

***“I’m afraid to lose everything, especially my family. I’m afraid my being gay will set us apart. I’m afraid how my life will turn out when I come out to society, and I’ll be that person who will always be discriminated.”***

– Anonymous, Children’s Consultation on SOGIE

***“For me, children are not criminals. Jail is no place for a child. I feel that the children are not just little adults. It’s a short-sighted solution which will mostly affect children who are poor. The children steal and break the law because of the parents who do not give guidance, peer and syndicates which influences them. Instead of criminalizing the children, the government should address the reasons why children commit crimes.”***

– Kenneth, 17 years old





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# Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development Goals: First Response to SDG Voluntary National Review 2019

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This paper expounds on the cultural dimensions of the SDGs from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) from Northern Central and Eastern Mindanao, Philippines. It consists of insights and reflections on the challenges and opportunities the SDGs --if it had had touched base us as we speak of its accomplishments and achievements since 2015. Interestingly, the tribal leaders consulted in the writing of this VNR response are unaware of the SDG commitments; nonetheless, they are grateful that their thoughts and opinions were being solicited.

This narrative presents nuggets of wisdom and voices of the esteemed IP leaders who were consistent in the practice of their cultural traditions. Their persistence notwithstanding, gradual but deep enculturation was brought about by the strong influence of modernization, the type



of industrial path taken by governments and business companies in the post-colonial era, the havoc resulting from the massive conversion of lands and exploitation of natural resources. In the midst of all these indigenous skills and knowledge have been subjected to continuing discrimination, as these are considered backward, of little worth, and bereft of academic certifications of merit and excellence, in contrast to recognition afforded to mainstream professionals' practice of their crafts or disciplines.

Reports on the state of extreme poverty and hunger have never been as seriously alarming as now. And of course, there is the real threat of climate change, where in the aftermath of every tragic and big disaster, humans struggle to cope with support from state social agencies and international donors responding for humanitarian considerations. Infrastructures-- from houses, to government offices to business establishments are built up again. But how about the restoration and recovery of damaged habitats, its biodiversity, land its ecosystems?

Does anyone take seriously the loss and damages suffered by nature, especially the loss of biodiversity—with thousands of species on the brink of extinction? Humans have forgotten the source, the base of our well-being or the anchor that would allow us to be resilient as we go through difficulties of the climate crisis that is already upon us. And, day by day, there's news regarding people dying of hunger, illness, and paucity of food or medicines for the poorest sectors.

With all these challenges in trying to achieve sustainable development, isn't it obvious that we all must do something about it? And that we all must contribute with viable actions and sustainable solutions to address environmental destruction, land degradation, overpopulation, pollution in all of nature—on the land, on the sea and beneath it, in the air, and in all surroundings. We need to change the consumerist and throw-away attitudes of the majority. We need to discard anything that is utilized for a single purpose, especially those made of plastics and non-recyclables. We need to initiate massive action using these as the push factors, for example as we undertake the National Greening Program, and vie for public participation in safeguarding and nurturing vital ecosystems.

We want to express our insights on the SDGs. Thank you for the space to allow our voices to be heard. We recognize that this is in recognition of our unique identities—being descendants of unconquered peoples—whose ancestors had taught us principles and values that shaped our present perspectives, norms, and visions. Our responses are guided by these, especially when we are asked what development is, and how its pursuit is being regulated by customary laws and traditions inside our traditional territories. More importantly, they provide the criteria by which we assess how safe and sustainable our communities are and what development undertakings are occurring in tribal domains.

For us, the IPs, we believe that the SDGs can be achieved in accordance with our spiritual, political, economic and socio-cultural values. Like all peoples across the world, we the IPs, do not want to be left behind. Our aspirations for a better future are in solidarity with the whole of humanity, despite our diversity in terms of lifestyles and mindsets. We can all work together in attaining sustainable development while increasing our chances to be resilient as we go through life affected by climate change.

Social Watch Philippines is actively involved in reporting the SDG performance from the perspective of civil society, sectors and communities. As a member of this civil society network since 1997, the Kitanglad Integrated NGOs, Inc. (KIN), took upon itself to consolidate the insights, the wisdom and recommendations of IP leaders who are actively involved in forest protection, resource management, ancestral domain sustainable development and protecting planning, protected area management, conflict mediation and peace building, and political mandatory representation in governments. They are successful awardees of certificates of ancestral domain titles, or at best, had their territories declared as indigenous community conserved areas.

### The Premise of SDGs (Us and Them context)

How does one explain the SDGs to Indigenous Peoples? How do we rationalize why we are aiming for sustainable development to high chieftains, or female rulers, or esteemed leaders of the tribe? How does one explain the rationale why the 17 SDG goals became global objectives that compel universal application and are bound by a set of priorities for the sake of the people and the planet, for all to achieve prosperity? And impliedly, what does a better future, a better place than what we have now, actually mean?

In justifying why, we need to be sustainable, we have to show that our birthright is being robbed by the current national and global trends and practices. And that it would take all nationwide or worldwide collective effort to transition to sustainable practices for the sake of one's country, of one's humanity.

How do we harness tribal alliance towards the fulfilment of the SDGs? Oftentimes, one is stuck with hopelessness to move forward, since we are confronted by mankind's greatest challenges—that is, climate change and the travails in carrying the heaviest burden of this generation-- which imprints on our history and on our very souls. Yet we take upon ourselves to think of practical solutions. How do you convey the SDG objectives such that it would give us a good feeling, positive thoughts, and appreciation of its aims?

Talaandig Overall Chieftain of Mt. Kitanglad, Datu Makapukaw/Adolino Linsahay Saway, admonishes us when asked about the SDGs, "Beyond keeping the scores of its indicators, are we mindful of its elements and connections? Even if we attain one objective one at a time, the visible systems do affect micro and subsystems; hence, we must believe all good and sincere efforts will align to one purpose. Only through kind and genuine efforts can we achieve these goals. In simple terms, these can be translated to better ways of taking care of ourselves, our families, our tribe/country, our environment. More importantly, each actor or service provider must give credit, give reverence to Mother Nature and to the spirits in our environment because they also take care of the entire ecosystems; they are our shadow allies in this world. These invisible elements are part of our world and they also deserve to undergo creative experience, to fulfil all our desires for a better world."



## The Goals that Matter

### 1 No Poverty

How does one define poverty in tribal lands wherein our domains are rich in natural resources and yet we are being deprived of access and its benefits? Put another way, when can we ever secure our equal share when government and investors extract these natural resources in our territories in order to build industries, supposedly for economic development?

How does one eradicate poverty when there is no balance in wealth sharing, nor in prosperity? You will go against the law of nature if you totally eradicate poverty (state of having none/having less). We simply need to balance poverty and prosperity (having more/having much more). Humans lost his virtue on righteousness that's why he lost the balance in his state of mind. Because if his state of mind is balanced, it does not matter he is wealthy or poor. If you go against the law of nature, you will go crazy. You do not even understand the order of the Universe. Even 90% of the IP leaders no longer understand this order of nature.

Just look at the mystery of the Holy Cross. We know Jesus Christ was crucified and died on the cross. Christians keep remembering his pains and sufferings to save humanity. But how many understood what his' life represents? What is the core message of the cross where he was nailed to death? The cross represents the Vertical and Horizontal Balance that his life represents—being EQUAL.

Jesus Christ represents a “centered” life—a life lived by being in the core or being in the middle—between God the Father and all of humanity. Jesus Christ showed life in perfect balance by keeping his position at the center (heart-center). The balance in the cross means, “vertically” means, one's faith to his/her Creator and his own life, and “horizontally”, how life becomes relevant to one's family and tribe, with the invisible elements of the spirit world and that all of nature--to also benefit for well-being and harmony.

How can it be possible when one's state of mind is not in tune and not in harmony with the laws of nature? We need to understand why there are 'big' or 'small', rich or poor people? This plays a crucial part in pursuing the well-being of all. One should understand his/her role to maintain balance. Human beings play a great role in maintaining the harmonious relationship between his spiritual relationship and his social and ecological relationship. These ties are important in achieving sustainability and resilience amid climate change.

### 2 Zero Hunger

The tribes are mainly self-sufficient, food growing communities. We do not have monthly or regular incomes for buying meals to eat or taking snacks. Oftentimes, we eat when hungry and it may be once or twice a day.

Inside our territories, our foods (plants and animals) are there for free. If these are naturally grown or sourced from the forests, we acknowledge to whom we must express thanksgiving when we take them. Hence, we also need to offer. This is the virtue of giving that continues from generation to generation. We are taught by our ancestors that whatever we take



from nature, we pay back, we give thanks, and we share. There are rituals we need to perform and behavioral norms that we have follow to sustain the cycle of giving and receiving.

### 3 Good Health and Well-being

The conditions on good health and well-being of the IPs are evident in their close relationship with the natural environment. After all, their food and medicines are sourced from the forests and their natural surroundings. A 108-year-old Talaandig grandmother revealed four secrets to her long life—eating herbs like *paku* (wild fern); *dakan* (a variety of rootcrop) and *hagpa* (a leafy vegetable that grows in the forest). And most importantly, her fourth secret is walking barefooted, to be always in touch with Mother Earth.

The tribe also believes that illness is a result of one’s commission of something prohibited by customary law or omission to do what is expected by customary laws or traditions. A mechanism for “sorry” ritual is widely practiced and even in determining penalties and compensation if ever there are damages or losses incurred.

More importantly, well-being for the tribes includes its vertical and horizontal or social relationships. It is anchored on one’s spiritual stance as one relates to Magbabaya-- the White Spirit, Great Creator of the Universe and that of the person’s social ties starting with himself, his family, his community, his tribe and environment filled with spirit guardians.

There are ailments though that are relatively new to the tribes, especially in the last decade. These include diabetes, high blood and cancer. They began to have these maladies whenever tribes were relocated from their original homes and forced to adapt to the city and urban life, subsisting on food available there. In these circumstances, hunger prevails especially since tribal parents and elders do not have regular incomes to buy the basic necessities.



#### 4 Quality Education.

The quality of education amongst the tribes rest on the quality and capacity of teachers (elders, parents and the *balignau* tribal mentors) and their depth of cultural knowledge that they can teach to the children and to their pupils. They need to be knowledgeable in terms of elements of nature and its surroundings, including knowledge of the invisible elements. These domains of tribal knowledge are transmitted at home when family and clan members gather during evenings and at our school for living traditions, which are *Tulugan* tribal structures.

It is true that we from the tribe also learned from the Western (colonial) education of the mainstream Filipino society. We also learn its language and systems. As we learn from both sides, integration becomes possible. But before embarking on learning outside one's culture, one must understand one's tribal roots first.

#### 5 Gender Equality.

In many cultural rites and celebrations women play a role. In marriage, they are sanctioned to officiate weddings. In conflict resolution, women play a unique role. Women conflict arbiters are very important. Warlike tribal defenders (mostly men) are expected to lock in their weapons, to be calm and mindful of the processes when *Baes* (tribal women) participate in the settlement of conflicts and blood feuds amongst clans and families. Their opinions matter. They are key actors in consensus building.

#### 6 Clean Water and Sanitation.

Let's consider the cultural definition of what is clean—in water, in the land, in the air, and just practically around us. One talks about dirt, being dirty, in the obvious and physical sense. But a more serious case is -the invisible dirt we throw and cause the environment, and it is not easy to cleanse. This happens when we violate its essence, when we do not respect its importance in sustaining our lives.

Can we remember in what instance we sought permission to use water? That in taking/using it, we do pay back (to nature spirits guarding it)? Do we express thanksgiving and gratefulness for its life-giving essence? Humans have forgotten this cycle, that is why there is so much rudeness, anger, or angry spirits affecting humans; ungratefulness, envy, hatred are in the energy surrounding us. The reason for our state of ill health is because we have forgotten how to be humble ourselves before Mother Nature.

IPs practice deep reverence to sources of water needed at home every day or in special circumstances. Take giving birth as an example. A *mangunguyamo* (tribal midwife), before performing her/his role in assisting delivery of a child, will perform a preliminary ritual. This includes offering a white coin as "*Atup ta Bugta*" as cover of Mother Earth, to seek apologies especially if blooded linens and items will be washed in the nearby river or creek.

It is in our cultural norm not to wash blood-stained cloths or linens in the river because these water sources are sacred, and it is valuable to our life. Doing so will pollute the whole river system. Instead, the washing will be done by the side and dirty water will be poured into the

land. This feels heavy, for the tribal elders recognize that both earth and water elements are the repositories of the dirt, garbage and excesses of humans.

Earth is called the *"Ininay-Inamay,"* for it is both the mother and father of humanity. Like parents, it does not complain about the rubbish and misdeeds we have done against its core, thus maligning its integrity. There are countless human violations committed against the earth—from urinating, defecating, shedding of unjust blood (killings), and throwing of garbage. Nature spirits therefore understand that it is from humans that most violations originate. And earth's invisible guardians demand justice too. For the tribe, this is not a small thing to be subjected to a trial when nature is up against our wrongdoings. If there's an offense, there will be payment or punishment as a consequence. This is a very ancient belief and practice, as an aspect of the tribal justice system.

But how many IPs still practice the sacred rites aimed at maintaining the good harmonious relationships of humans, with the spirit inhabitants of Mother Nature and its environs? We do not have a large number left of the sincere practitioners of the ways of the ancients, and there are more people now who do not know and do not give regard its importance. Do we not realize why earth and land disasters hit us the most in these times? Nature's wrath is only a response to the abuses and ignorance of people.

Our sacred spaces in the forest domains are being violated. Both soldiers and rebels, these men coming from armed battles, enter these sacred spaces without going through cleansing rituals. There are those who eat dogs while trekking to the mountains where our sacred altars are located. Stolen foods are offered, or worse, offering to nature spirits or cleansing rituals are either omitted or forgotten before entering the sacred domains or tribal territories.



## 10 Reduced Inequalities

Despite the enactment of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, the Philippine government still has to show seriousness and sincerity in establishing and respecting our four fundamental rights—the right to self-determination, the right to cultural integrity, the social, human and political rights, and the right to one’s ancestral domains.

Consider wealth sharing. Our ancestral domains are rich in natural resources; in fact, we can be millionaires if we make use of these for our collective needs and welfare. However, the natural resources found in our domains are also a source of capital that bring about economic prosperity to all Filipinos around the country. There are large tracts of ancestral domains that are put under agricultural programs, agrarian reform, reforestation, integrated forest management, protected areas, logging and mining concessionaires, eco-agritourism destinations, recreational, heritage and aesthetic sites. The forests and patches of land left to us to settle, enjoy, and make a living under have been restricted and have shrunk considerably because of governmental policies that have always been more favorable to migrants and settlers from other places.

For instance, the Department of Public Works and Highways projects that open up road networks in remote mountain areas, which did not go through proper consultation nor ensured free and prior informed consent and consent rituals, have met with many road accidents that cost lives of innocent passers-by. On the one hand, it may be that roads are important to provide access to remote tribal communities and they too will benefit from it, most especially in transporting their agricultural products. But did they go through public consultations? How many even considered the possibility that such access roads going to remote and protected domains also may have led to the desecration of our sacred places?

On the other hand, in the creation of roads for the law on right-of-way ensures that private owners of land expropriated by government using its eminent domain powers, are compensated. But what about the collective owners like the tribe? Can’t we be rightfully be compensated too? It is easy to compensate taxpayers, but perhaps because the tribes do not pay tax in their ancestral domains, they are given no compensation.

From the time of our parents and elders, we have-- been protecting the forests, watersheds, and river systems from destructive activities; safeguarding these through the power of cultural traditions and application of customary laws. But why are such intergenerational efforts not recognized too as valued labor or environmental and social equity that warrant just compensation? Conserved biodiversity, managed forests and ecosystems benefit the tribes and the general Filipino public as well. Is there consideration to such tribal efforts, for a compensation or long-term reward mechanism?

Climate change affects vulnerable IP communities, just as it does to marginalized groups of people. In a glaring example in southern Philippines, the rampant incidence of flooding and severe soil erosion in Bukidnon and Upper Misamis Oriental because of its sloping topography had dumped the flood and mud waters downstream to lowland Cagayan de Oro. But the irony of the situation is that, as the floods and silt in increasing volumes go down to the lowlands, more and more people come to resettle in the highlands of Bukidnon, thereby increasing its population pressures and putting more stress on the critical resources that are being managed in the highlands. As more prospectors come up to Bukidnon to settle and/or do business,

the buying of tribal lands has significantly increased over the years. It is foreseeable that an unstoppable trend of buying tribal properties will proceed unregulated. The tendency is for more of these lands to go to migrants for business purposes. Since tribal families are also financially constrained, individual sale or rent of tribal lands is difficult to stop. With the weakening of the tribal socio-political structure, and the disenfranchisement of traditional leaders, the overwhelming push of outside influence can further divide the already loose tribal clans and families. Tribal leaders, if left on their own, will have difficulty in keeping hold of their domains. Hence, allies in the civil society organizations must be at their side to warn them of the impacts of in-migration.

Our way to achieving the SDG is to give back what belongs to us; to restore our dignity and give due respect to our capacities and potentials. Give respect to our cultural system, to allow us to thrive within our own lands and territories and governed by our own spiritual and cultural principles and customary norms.

In terms of political and economic aspects, we can cope with the assurance that we will also be given equal social protection. This is the only way that we can cope in this challenged world under climate change.

## 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

We are still in a sustainable way of life at the community level. We are speaking in terms of the IPs located in Mts. Kitanglad, Kalatungan (KitKat protected areas of almost 100,000 hectares), and Pantaron Range (together known as KKP), which is Bukidnon's largest mountain range where our tribe has lived since time immemorial. We also have counterparts in Mts. Kimangkil, Kalanawan, Sumagaya and Pamalihi (KKSP) of Misamis Oriental; in the Tagoloan and Cagayan de Oro River basins; and our far neighbors in Bayandugan and San Luis, Agusan del Sur. In these areas, you can find vast fruit and vegetable monocrop plantations, mining and logging concessionaires, countryside insurgency. Widespread poverty haunts us especially when extremes of drought or heavy rains cause damage to our farm livelihoods, and despite a seemingly abundant image of forests and land cover in our domains. These threats continue to haunt us, yet we choose to live in accordance with our cultural identities and principles. We abide by the rules of rituals before deciding on important issues or undertake activities that impact many. Our appeal to the Philippine Government is to be true to its calling in natural resource management and forest conservation, for we know we can be partners in the long-term. We only need opportunities to embark on sustainable livelihoods that will not trap in indebtedness nor force us to use ill technologies that will only harm our fragile environment.

Community livelihoods and land use practices are still in the rhythm and harmony of nature; ritual rites for livelihoods are still observed and deep spiritual culture and kinship ties remain strong and vibrant. With continued vigilance and advocacy to fully implement the IPRA, with a government supportive of the institutionalization of Indigenous Political Structures, wherein tribal leaders reign armed with knowledge of their customary laws, such sustainable communities will multiply and thrive if tribal rights and governance are fully observed and adhered to.

### 13 Climate Action

The ancestral domain territories in Mts. Kitanglad and Kalatungan Protected Areas are safeguarded by our own tribal forest guardians and backed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and state law enforcement officers like forest guards. Violations on park laws must be dealt with seriously either through imprisonment and payment of penalties. The forest cover in the KitKat PAs can help safeguard the public from climate adversities.

### 14-15 Life Below Water and Life Above Land

For life below water, the observance of care and ritual before using and dispensing water and water sources serve to do no harm to the living creatures swimming in rivers, seas, springs, creeks, etc. On life above land, we value the trees, the plants and animal wildlife, which we believe are owned and guarded by nature spirits; hence, do not take them without asking permission and we make ritual offering for every occasion of taking and using.

We have a different view of the importance of land, and it is not merely to serve the whims and avarice for luxuries of humans. It is on land where our ancestors are buried. It is also land that serves as prison of malevolent spirits and the underworld. As land is excavated more widely and deeply, parts of it are crushed and precious stones are taken, purportedly for development to take place. Yet these rampant extractive activities, tilts the balance of nature.

Extracting the wealth like precious gem stones stored on land through mining, without seeking permission, also results in disasters. The ritual process in communicating to the spirit world enables the tribe to negotiate what can be allowed or not in terms of use of resources. There will always be signs or omens to guide us whether an action is pleasing or not to the eyes of invisible guardians dwelling in nature.

In another instance, a tribal blacksmith, before he makes another farm tool would perform a ritual to ask forgiveness if he had to fell down a tree to use it in his mouldings and iron works. Every tribal community member, should he/she decide to cut down a tree, must also go through an acceptance ritual. He/she will perform divination if cutting of a tree is allowed by nature spirits.

Since the time of our grand ancestors, the intact forests we see around our domains are the same forest landscapes that our forebears had utilized, secured and passed on. The altars installed in the sacred peaks and in river points are the same worship sites of our ancestors. We are proud to live this cultural life even if we have yet to benefit from them in like manner that 'environmentalists' in government and NGOs get rewarded for jobs well done.

Taking care of our environment is our duty and the practice of our culture is our proof and testament to the histories of who we are and to what path of development we will thrive.





### 16 Peace and Justice and Strong Institutions.

No one assumes the role of *datu*-ship (leadership) if one is unable to care for the wildlife, mountains, forests, and the spirits in nature. A true *datu* has the power to regulate the balance of elements of nature. Through ritual prayers, a *datu* (or *bae* if female) is able to summon the names of particular spirit/s and communicate concerns that need to be addressed to restore the harmony that has been disrupted or disturbed. With such an important role, it is prohibited for one to usurp the position of a leader of a tribe. His/her authority must be respected, not only by humans, but also by the spirit guides that witnessed the ordination.

In terms of justice, our political and justice systems are not respected by outsiders. We have our own kind of leaders who mediate and settle even blood feuds amongst kin especially those in high insurgency areas (e.g. Agusan del Sur tribal municipalities) where tribal members are torn between their loyalty to the government soldiers and to the armed rebels. Thus, decades-old conflicts remain unsolved in which no cultural remedy is made possible. We are stuck in a dismal and conflicting situation that divide us even more.

Our grand elders admonished that the only way to stop the bloody conflict is to undertake the 'healing ritual of the land.' Officiated by the prominent shamans of the tribe, this rite resolves *lidu* or blood wars among clans and relatives. In an opportune time, warring parties between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the New People's Army and their members in the tribe will ask for forgiveness from each other, and also acknowledge and apologize for the damages and deaths that resulted during bombings.

Interestingly, in 2012 one such ritual took place in Daraghuyan-Bukidnon Tribe managed by Bae Inatlawan. A bombing incident occurred within their territories and their sacred domains. The erstwhile intact forests of Mt. Dulang-Dulang was hit by incendiary bombs, which burned down a portion of the forests. The bombing was ordered by the battalion commander of the 403rd Brigade as a helicopter gunship tried to rescue its fellows who encountered the New People's Army (NPA) in the tribal areas.

Bae Inatlawan and her community were alarmed by the incident -- fearful of the adverse consequences when spirits in sacred domains are disturbed. With support from former Governor Alex Calingasan, Bae Inatlawan summoned then Col. Romeo Gapuz to come for a dialogue at the Capitol. In the dialogue witnessed by stakeholders of Mt. Kitanglad, the military official agreed to submit to the required ritual to take place with his participation together with his high-ranking officers. The planned 'sorry ritual' was held a week after the dialogue, which thereafter sealed a good relationship between the Daraghuyan tribe and the military. Unfortunately, representatives from the NPA rebels failed to show up.

The contribution of IPs in building peace and just institutions is anchored on inner strength. It encourages everyone to admit responsibility for having caused damages and to act on wrongdoings, and with sincere heart, to apologize, make amends and strive to maintain a healthy and lasting relationship of trust and respect. The covenants of peace accord are sealed through a ritual where nature spirits are also summoned to be witnesses in forging mutual and beneficial agreements leading to peace and order in the community and in the environment.

### 17 Partnership to Achieve the Goals

The Council of Elders of Mts. Kitanglad and Kalatungan Ranges which spans approximately 102,000 hectares govern the predominantly IP-inhabited protected areas claimed by the Talaandig, Bukidnon, Higaonon and Manobo/Menuvu Tribes and tenured migrants who considered the tribal lands as second home. The IPs are active partners in the multi-stakeholder Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) composed of representatives from local government units, government agencies, academic institutions and NGOs. The IPs in this board also hold important decision-making roles on matters that concern biodiversity conservation, sustainable development (that promotes non-destructive livelihood activities and enterprises). Tribal leaders weigh on these issues guided by bicultural significance and sensitivity so as to do no harm.

The IPs work in partnership with the local governments surrounding the parks that comprise their ancestral domains. They also form a collective community-based park protection group in the Kitanglad Guards Volunteers (KGVs), formalized in 1998) and currently with 380 members, and the Bantay Lasang Volunteers (BLVs) of about 150 members organized in 2000. They are provided with modest honorariums by their respective local government units. The main tasks of the KGVs and the BLVs include the monthly conduct of biodiversity monitoring, undertaking of forest rehabilitation under the National Greening Program and agroforestry, arresting park violators, and maintaining environment-friendly and culturally accepted livelihoods.

Ancestral domain territories share boundaries with local governments. Geopolitical subdivisions had cut into the vast tribal territories piece by piece. Since 2000, there have been tribal domains that have successfully obtained their CADTs, while the majority continue to assert tribal governance on the basis of their autonomous claims under native titles. A good show of interface between culture and protected area management is the accommodation of cultural policies that govern entry, resource use and development plans that affect ancestral domains. The IPRA policy on free and prior informed consent is also observed and enforced in the KitKat protected areas.



Moreover, the IPs collaborate with the DENR in its avowed goal to protect the natural resources to ensure the well-being of all, to conserve biodiversity and its ecosystems to ensure human survival and well-being. This partnership is influenced by the National Integrated Protected Areas Systems Act of (NIPAS) 1992 where government commits to protect the environment and ensure the path towards sustainable development. These two commitments were agreed by members of the UN gathered at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. These global accords acknowledge the fact that humanity has only one home—the planet Earth. Thus, a collective goal with corresponding local actions can do a lot in ensuring the survival of all living creatures, without compromising the integrity of life-giving resources that provide general well-being.

## Conclusion:

There is more to tell about our responses to the SDGs. But is it possible to further expound on our understanding of the SDGs and its premises in only one consultation with IP leaders and elders?

Indigenous knowledge and insights on the SDGs can offer practical solutions to global problems.

Institutions working for just and humane societies should harness their strengths to and educate people on sustainability starting with one's personal values and habits. Much of the solutions to achieving the SDGs are hinged on a balanced human sense; that is, understanding of his purpose of life, and at the same time, gratitude and appreciation of relationships that nurture love and respect and cultivation of the right values to deal with world around us.

*Key Informants Who Shared their Wisdom, Ideas and Insights for this IP VNR:*

1. Datu Makapukaw/Adolino L. Saway – Overall Chieftain of the Talaandig Tribe and the Council of Elders, Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park; also Indigenous Mandatory Representative of Lantapan, Bukidnon; also a member of Mt. Kitanglad Protected Area Management Board
2. Bae Inatlawan/Adelina Tarino – Overall Chieftain, Head Claimant, and member of Council of Elders of Mt. Kitanglad; also IPMR of Brgy. Dalwangan, Malaybalay City; also a member of Mt. Kitanglad PAMB
3. Engr. Chona Labaon – Provincial Officer, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples of Bukidnon; also a member of the Mts. Kitanglad and Kalatungan (KitKat) PAMB
4. Datu Aligpulos/Dominador Decano – Talaandig young Chieftain and KIN Tribal Facilitator for the KitKat PAs; Lead organizer of the Kitanglad Guards Volunteers and the Council of Elders
5. Datu Dungkuan/Rio Besto – Overall Chieftain and Head Claimant for Miarayon, Lapok, Lirongan, Talaandig Tribal Association (MILALITTRA); a member of Mt. Kalatungan PAMB
6. Bae Nene Napongahan – Banwaon Leader and IPMR of San Luis, Agusan del Sur
7. Bae Lucy Rico – Manobo Leader of Bayandugan, Agusan del Sur

# Tobacco Control: A Leverage to Attain SDGs in the Philippines

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One of the key elements of Sustainable Development Goals is interconnectivity. As such, much can be said about the direct and indirect relation of one goal to the other. Banking in such connections, assessing the interconnection and interlinkages of goals and targets will be an accelerator to ensure that no one is truly left behind.

To achieve this, all stakeholders must ensure that the implementation of SDGs shall largely take note of its intrinsic interconnection. Several recommendations point to whole of society, whole of government approach in tackling SDGs. The interconnection of SDGs shows the potential benefits of taking a broad and multi-sectoral approach. By examining the connections of SDG targets, all sectors involved can focus on programs with considerable impacts on the targets. As such, key entities involved in the implementation of SDGs should not categorize goals as individual and separate projects they can choose from.



In view of the foregoing, tobacco control is suggested to be a catalytic action with impacts on most SDG targets. As a background, tobacco control is explicitly provided in the SDG targets under Goal 3 - reducing non-communicable diseases and implementation of the World Health Organization – Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The mere inclusion of tobacco control is already a great achievement, revealing the extent of damage nicotine addiction has caused to all sectors of the society. But assessment of progress in the target is needed. In an analysis of the Global Burden of Disease Study, Lancet Public Health argued that without proper action and advocacy, tobacco control, particularly WHO FCTC, might not be properly reflected in sustainable development agenda of countries. It is important that the stakeholders from all sectors are reminded of their shared responsibility over this action. While listed as a health target, looking at this global problem as a health issue alone is a myopic perspective.

With the extent of societal harm it produces, tobacco use may actually be considered a development issue. Aside from health, the tobacco problem contributes to poverty, gender inequality, and environmental issues, to name a few. It has caused the Philippines around Php210 billion in economic losses just from four diseases attributed to tobacco use. Moreover, the poor are disproportionately burdened with the ill-effects of tobacco. It also hampers food security and environmental protection, exacerbating climate change due to its significant damage that adds to worldwide deforestation and greenhouse gasses emission. A news article, citing the National Tobacco Administration and Forest Management Bureau, data from four tobacco-curing provinces in the Philippines reveal that around 3.6 million trees have been chopped down for tobacco-curing alone. This does not take into account the areas deforested for tobacco farming expansion and other tobacco-related activities.

While it is true that every hour, 10 Filipinos die due to tobacco-related diseases, or a total of 117,000 deaths per year as per the most recent Department of Health Data, effective solutions cannot be arrived at if the tobacco epidemic is classified merely as a health issue. The extent of damage of tobacco to all sectors of society warrants immediate action from all stakeholders. Extensively studying the direct and indirect relationships of tobacco control to other SDG targets should be a compelling endeavor for government, advocates, and other stakeholders.

The 2030 agenda to which 193 member states of the UN pledged explicitly reminded all entities to uphold inclusiveness, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and human rights approach in all aspects of SDG implementation. These calls for multi-stakeholder action and partnership to mobilize knowledge-sharing, expertise, resources, and the like, to achieve universal sustainable development, regardless of economic status, age, gender, and ethnicity. All stakeholders, especially those outside the government structures, should ensure that such declaration will not remain as mere rhetoric. Every single stakeholder must have a defined role and participation and hold the government as the duty-bearer of sustainable development in the country. However, the state's innate limitations must compel civil society, the public, and other non-state stakeholders to establish and strengthen their roles and positions.

One of the issues, both local and international, is financing these goals. On several occasions, ranking officials from the United Nations have expressed alarm regarding issues of lack of financing for the SDGs. Given this problem, tobacco control may offer one innovative financing for development. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, attended by high-level political representatives, Heads of States, ranking finance and development officials, and other

stakeholders, suggested “*price and tax measures to tobacco to reduce tobacco consumption and health care costs and represent a revenue stream for financing development in many countries*”. (Paragraph 32, Resolution 69/313). This is a crucial opportunity for governments, especially those from low to middle income countries, to look at the role of tobacco tax to finance their SDG agenda. It is also important for all non-state stakeholders to remind government to adhere to such resolutions.

This paper will elaborate on the intersection of tobacco control with 16 out of 17 SDGs. The data presented are matched with the SDG targets as adopted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This paper seeks to guide stakeholders to consider tobacco control as an accelerator in the SDG implementation in the country.

### **FAST FACTS:**

#### **What is WHO – Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)**

- WHO – FCTC is the world’s response to the global tobacco epidemic
- It is considered as the first global public health treaty

#### **An Overview of WHO – FCTC**

- Articles 3-5: establish the objective, guiding principles and general obligations engendered by the treaty;
- Articles 6 to 14: demand-side reduction measures;
- Articles 15-17: supply-side reduction measures;
- Article 18: protection of the environment;
- Article 19: liability;
- Articles 20-22: cooperation and communication;
- Articles 23-26: institutional arrangements and financial resources;
- Article 27: settlement of disputes;
- Articles 28-29: development of the convention; and
- Articles 30-38: “final provisions”, covering statutory matters such as means of acceding to the Convention, entry into force, and so on.

#### **The Gaps in Implementing FCTC – The DOH 2018 Report**

- Lacks coordinating mechanism;
- No specific budget for tobacco control;
- No focal person for tobacco control;
- No tracking and tracing;
- Lacks data on illicit trade and its magnitude;
- Lacks data on tobacco consumption (actual vs production)

## Key Philippine Government Milestones

- Joint Memorandum Circular of Civil Service Commission and Department of Health regarding the protection of bureaucracy against tobacco industry interference (currently adopted by 19 government agencies)
- Passage of Sin Tax Law in 2012 and the additional tobacco tax bill awaiting the President's signature
- Executive Order # 26 – Establishment of Smoke-free Places in Public and Enclosed Spaces
- Graphic Health Warning Laws
- Red Orchid Awards
- International Cooperation and Collaboration

## Tobacco Control and SDGs: The Challenge

- Philippines relies on the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022 as the primary catalyst for concerted actions, integrating in it the country's commitments to the SDGs.
- But nowhere in the 297-page PDP was tobacco control recommended as an accelerator for sustainable development nor a leverage in the implementation of the 17 SDGs.
- *The only mention of tobacco was on page 120: ‘...”Triple burden of disease” is a public health concern. Morbidity caused by infectious diseases, mortality by non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and emerging incidence of injuries, mental health, and alcohol and drug abuse threaten the country with the triple burden of disease. Since mortality from NCDs is increasing, the public needs to be aware of risk factors such as **smoking**, excessive alcohol consumption, poor diet, and lack of physical activity. ....’*
- Even in taxation to curb NCDs, the PDP recommended sugar and sweetened beverages be taxed further, **no mention of higher (unitary) tax on tobacco products** to make it more inaccessible to the poor, children, and youth.
- At the global level, progress was appreciated for the inclusion of FCTC as a means of implementing SDG 3. However, the Philippine indicators used were limited only to two, that of 1) age-standardized consumption of tobacco products and 2) reduction in smoking prevalence (PSA adopted targets and indicators).
- How then do advocates proceed in a situation wherein the development blueprint and so-called primary catalyst excludes tobacco control?



## KEY FACTS: HOW TOBACCO DETRIMENTS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

### SDG 1: No Poverty

SDG 1 primarily focuses on reducing and eradicating poverty in international and local contexts. It seeks to develop interrelated strategies which cater to the promotion of social protection systems, decent employment, and building of the resilience of the poor <sup>1</sup>. The Philippines adopted 5 targets to achieve SDG 1<sup>2</sup>. Current government statistics reveal that 21.0 percent of the population is living below the poverty line as of the first semester of 2018. It is interesting to look at factors that keep or push Filipino families over the poverty threshold.

- On a national perspective, it is estimated that around Php210 billion of economic losses have been attributed to tobacco. Factors included in the calculation are 1) healthcare costs, 2) productivity losses, 3) premature death losses<sup>4</sup>.
- Breadwinners exiting the labor market because of ill-effects of tobacco will have detrimental effects on their families.
- An average smoker spends Php678 on cigarettes monthly. Spending on cigarettes are on par with the expenditures of poor Filipino families on education and health<sup>5,6</sup>.

Given the foregoing, it is not too farfetched to conclude that tobacco control will indeed accelerate poverty alleviation efforts.

### SDG 2: Zero Hunger

SDG 2 focuses on making nutritious and healthy food accessible and sustainable for everyone. In relation to this, it added targets to address malnutrition and ensure nutritional needs of children, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons. The UN SDG Report in 2017 elaborated factors to consider in achieving SDG 2. These factors, which play a crucial role in food security, include well-functioning markets, increased income for smallholder farmers, equal access to technology and land, additional investments, and productive agricultural sectors. However, it is important to recognize that hunger cannot be solved by increasing food production alone <sup>[1]</sup>.

- All money used to purchase cigarettes and to address its deleterious impacts (e.g. health costs) are money not invested in food and nutrition<sup>6</sup>.
- The daily spending on cigarettes by an average smoker is equivalent to 2-3 kilograms of rice NFA rice, 3-6 cans of sardines, and 3-5 packs of 500g of iodized salt<sup>11, 12</sup>.
- RA 10351 provides generous funding to support the shift of tobacco farmers to other crops<sup>13</sup>. A study in 2009 concluded that areas suitable for tobacco cultivation in Region 1, a well-known, tobacco-producing area in the Philippines, are also suitable for growing alternative crops<sup>14</sup>.
- Beyond health risks to farmers, tobacco farming hampers food security because the crop depletes nutrients, like nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous from the soil faster than other alternative crops<sup>18</sup>.

## SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

SDG 3 seeks to address major health issues of today. This covers maternal, reproductive, and child health; communicable diseases; non-communicable diseases; substance and alcohol abuse; road safety; universal health care; tobacco control; and research and development. In the Philippines, tobacco control has assumed a significant role in the fulfillment of good health and well-being. Available data attest to the unprecedented success in the country's healthcare after the enactment of RA 10351. The 2018 Sin Tax Law Incremental Revenue for Health reflected the most recent data on the improvement of the country's healthcare due to sin tax revenues<sup>18,19</sup>.

- Before 2012, the smoking prevalence of Filipinos was around 28%. After the passage of the Sin Tax Law, this was reduced to around 23%.
- It has also helped in the fulfillment of MDGs and SDGs (on malaria, HIV, TB, NCDs, etc.), which regularly receive a part of the Sin Tax revenues<sup>20</sup>.

Tobacco remains as the single deadliest behavioral risk factor for NCDs, with 67% of total NCD deaths attributed to tobacco<sup>21,22</sup>. Secondhand smoke is most prevalent on public transportation (38%) and homes (35%). Globally, it accounts for 890,000 deaths. In another study, it accounted for 3,000 lung cancer deaths in the Philippines<sup>23,24,25,26</sup>. With the rate of health impacts of tobacco, raising tobacco tax has become a popular policy in the country, with 2 out of 3 Filipinos in support of the call<sup>27</sup>.

## SDG 4: Quality Education

Tobacco farming has negative externalities that hamper the attainment of SDG 4. While child labor is not exclusive to tobacco farming alone, health and occupational hazards in all stages of tobacco production are dangerous to children. Children and women are more susceptible to diseases like green tobacco sickness. This leads to missed educational opportunities<sup>28</sup>.

- Families in tobacco-growing areas often often resort to unpaid child labor<sup>29</sup>. While tobacco industry companies may engage in corporate social responsibility measures by tobacco industry companies in areas like education, there is no strong statement issuing from them on the elimination of child labor.
- In a survey in 2008 by a non-government organization, around 47% of all children in the survey areas were involved in activities considered as child labor. Around 2% of them had been injured or had caught illnesses sometime in their line of work. About 6.5% of the children were engaged in hazardous activities like applying chemicals<sup>30</sup>.
- About 7 out of 10 students have been exposed to smokers / cigarettes / secondhand smoke in the school premises<sup>24</sup>.



## SDG 5: Gender Equality

SDG 5 seeks to put an end to discrimination and violence to women and young girls. Aside from the ill effects of smoking, women have been disproportionately victimized by secondhand smoke, sometimes resulting in intergenerational effects of the tobacco (i.e on the fetus during pregnancy). The tobacco industry has been channeling efforts to attract the women population to start smoking<sup>24</sup>.

- Women are also victims of unpaid family labor in tobacco farming, and is 1.5 times more likely to catch illnesses related to tobacco production<sup>16,31</sup>.
- Among non-smokers, women are more exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes than the men<sup>24</sup>. In fact, more women die from lung cancer more than any other cancer, including breast cancer<sup>22</sup>.
- Secondhand smoke exposure is the least explored violence against women<sup>32</sup>. Worse, a study revealed that secondhand smoke lingers for 2.5 hours inside households even with the windows open<sup>33</sup>.
- Smoking has gender-specific risk effects on women, which often extends to their children<sup>34,35</sup>.

## SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

A safe environment with sustainable and clean water is a prerequisite for growth and inclusivity. With all life forms dependent on water, it is a moral, social, and legal obligation to protect all sources of water from pollution, misuse, and wastage.

- Tobacco, being a mono-crop, is not only water-intensive; it also demands high quantities of chemicals, which pollute waterways. Chemicals leach within the soil and groundwater, contaminating drinking supplies and food chains. In some studies, it has been proven to account for wildlife deaths<sup>6,36</sup>.
- Globally, it is estimated that discarded cigarette filters weigh around 175,200 tonnes or 4.5 trillion cigarette butts<sup>37,38</sup>. It is the abundant littered item collected in beaches and coastal areas.
- It is highly possible that tobacco waste may well be proven to be a significant environment contaminant and human health hazard through bioaccumulation<sup>39</sup>.

## SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Universal access to clean, sustainable, and reliable energy is a global concern. With threats of global warming and climate change, there has been an ever-growing movement to shift to sustainable energy sources that pose less carbon emission. With its unsustainable practice, tobacco farming poses risks to attaining SDG 7 targets on clean fuels and technologies.

- There are several proposals in relation to tobacco control and sustainable energy. A pioneering study in North Carolina seeks to establish solar farms in tobacco farms.<sup>40</sup> However, this does not take into account how this will affect food security.
- Curing tobacco has posed immense risks in sustainable clean cooking fuels and technologies. Locally, tobacco is cured manually with wood procured from increasingly

deforested areas. Philip Morris International revealed that it needs 10 kilograms of wood to cure 1 kilogram of tobacco leaves. In cigarette production, it is estimated that 1 tree is cut down for every 300 cigarettes produced<sup>41, 42</sup>. In major tobacco growing provinces, an average of 3.6 million trees per year were cut down as fuel wood in tobacco curing<sup>43</sup>.

## **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

This SDG Goal focuses on sustainability of employment which seeks to create an enabling environment where people are skilled, with fair income, capacitated with continuous learning and heightened productivity. Safe working spaces are also highlighted. The conditions within tobacco farming preclude achievement of such goals.

- As already mentioned, it is estimated that the economy losses Php210 billion just from four major sickness attributed to tobacco use<sup>4</sup>.
- Tobacco farmers are significantly more susceptible to illnesses more than other farmer counterparts<sup>15, 17</sup>.
- Contrary to claims of the tobacco industry, tobacco is not the most profitable crop that farmers can produce vis-à-vis other available crops. Not only do vegetable and other crops make more money, their calculation of potential income disregards the fact that tobacco is greatly more labor intensive and requires higher input costs<sup>44</sup>.

## **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**

One of the key targets in achieving SDG 10 is to sustain the income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population. Tobacco farmers are more disadvantaged in that they are earning less while doing more work, compared with farmers of other high-value crops.

- In a study in 2009, 88% of tobacco farmers have an annual income lower than the poverty threshold at the time. Moreover, 60% of the tobacco farmers are mere tenants in the land they cultivate<sup>14</sup>.
- Tobacco control is not just about health and financing; it also has to do with social protection policy, which marginalized groups often have less of.
- The problem impacts on both smokers and the society at large. And yet it is the poor that are more likely to bear a disproportionate weight of the burdens caused by smoking.

## **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**

With rapid urbanization, a huge challenge has risen for countries to promote adequate and sustainable housing and decent community habitats. Infrastructure and cities that can withstand disasters and promote favorable living standards are a major concern. Air quality and waste management in urban areas are also important concerns. With the growing demand for livable communities, especially in urban areas, it is important to look at the factors that deny this right to urban citizens, related to tobacco use.

- In the recent years, littered cigarettes ranked as the second most prevalent cause of fire in the National Capital Region and nationwide<sup>45</sup>.
- A well-known fact, tobacco degrades air quality. Smoking is the leading cause of indoor pollution, with secondhand smoke lingering for 2.5 hours even with the windows open<sup>41</sup>.
- Thirdhand smoke also leaches through walls, curtains, and furniture which exacerbates the dangers, especially to women and children.

## SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

This SDG seeks to promote efficient use of resources to reduce the impact of economic activities to the environment. This primarily covers management of hazardous chemicals and wastes to reduce the impact on the environment and human lives <sup>[1]</sup><sup>42</sup>. Tobacco use is an unsustainable practice, which not only degrades the environment; it also but poses risks on food security and production, and increases pollution.

- In the Philippines, data shows that an annual average of 3.6 million trees are cut down for tobacco curing<sup>43</sup>. This translates to 10 kilograms of wood per 1 kilogram of tobacco leaf, or 1 tree per 300 cigarettes for the entire process<sup>41, 42</sup>.
- Post-consumption waste in the use of tobacco is a growing problem. Over the past 20 years, global production of tobacco has generated a total of 45 million tons of solid wastes, 6 million tons of nicotine wastes, and 4 million tons of chemical wastes (2015 study)<sup>46</sup>.
- Bio-accumulation of chemicals from tobacco wastes are expected to be a significant environmental concern and a human health hazard in the near future<sup>39</sup>.

## SDG 13: Climate Action

Article 18 of the WHO FCTC specifically calls for the protection of the environment and tobacco use has a definite major impact on our natural resources.

- Worldwide, tobacco produces 2.6 billion kilograms of carbon dioxide and 5.2 billion kilograms of methane which degrades air quality.
- It is estimated that 5% of global greenhouse production are from deforestation caused by tobacco farming and curing.
- It is estimated that 1 tree is being cut down for every 300 cigarettes<sup>41, 42</sup>. In major tobacco growing provinces, an average of 3.6 million trees per year were cut down to use as fuel wood in tobacco curing.<sup>43</sup>In 1996 – 2001 alone, deforested areas were equivalent to 7, 412 hectares, comparable to the size of the cities of Manila and Makati combined<sup>43</sup>.

## SDG 14: Life Below Water and SDG 15: Life on Land

Preservation and sustaining the Earth's marine and terrestrial species and ecosystems is the at core of SDG 14 and 15. Worsening conditions of nature and the threat of climate change and global warming make it imperative to take care of our ecosystems. Doing so will benefit communities and populations directly dependent on them<sup>17</sup>.

- With the load of cigarette butts littered every year at a rate 4.5 - 6 trillion filters, it is expected that it will generate much harm to our bodies of water and the organisms living in them<sup>6,37,38</sup>.
- Cigarette butts have been found in the stomachs of marine animals like fishes and whales, and sometimes found even in birds. Solid wastes left by smoking pose the risk of chemical poisoning to life below water<sup>46</sup>.
- Chemicals from tobacco farming leach through soil and groundwater, contaminating drinking supplies and food chains, and accounting for wildlife deaths<sup>36</sup>.
- As mentioned earlier, deforestation rate in tobacco growing areas cannot be singled out.
- Globally, only around 1% of arable land are dedicated to tobacco farming. However, estimates in low to middle income countries indicate that 5% of deforestation is due to tobacco farming alone. About 200,000 hectares are annually deforested worldwide because of tobacco farming<sup>46</sup>.

## SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Tobacco corporate interference in government institutions is a major problem for tobacco control, especially in low to middle income countries. With political connections deeply rooted in the system, the tobacco industry amasses billions of profits while leaving exponential harms to health, economy, and the society.

WHO FCTC, under Article 5.3, calls for awareness and steps to get rid of tobacco interference.

The Tobacco Interference Index is used to measure the interference of tobacco companies.

- According to the most recent data in 2017, the Philippines scores better than other ASEAN counterparts. However, it has not made any improvements to advance the implementation of Article 5.3 of the FCTC. As such, there still much to be done<sup>48</sup>.
- The Civil Service Commission – Department of Health Joint Memorandum Order explicitly forbids government officials and employees from collaborating with the tobacco industry and their CSR activities. However, there were many recorded cases in violation of the mentioned Joint Memorandum Order.
- Not only has the tobacco industry collaborated with some government officials, it has time and again flexed its strength by lodging legal complaints against government offices for implementing policies regarding smoke-free zones, restricted promotions and advertisements, and related activities. Based on 2010 data, 12 cases have been filed by the tobacco industry.
- Tobacco funds for tobacco farmers assistance have been historically tainted with corruption. The most notorious is a Php1.3 billion-controversy. More recently, a House Committee recommended legal charges against then Governor Imee Marcos for tobacco funds misuse<sup>49</sup>.

## SDG 17: Partnership for Goals

Tobacco taxation, and the intersectoral collaboration it requires, enhances domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collections. 6 It is already proven that taxing sin products, like tobacco and alcohol, has the capability to generate billions of funds while also serving as a public health intervention. Now that tobacco control can also be associated with the attainment of SDGs, it is imperative to look at this as a policy that will cater to the needs of society.

- UN General Assembly adopted the Addis Abba Action Agenda which elaborated actions and programs to finance SDGs. It specifically mentioned tobacco tax as a health and financing measure under Paragraph 32. However, any trade-off being negotiated must be examined.

### General Recommendations:

- Integrate WHO – FCTC guidelines in our national and local policies.
- Advocate funding for tobacco control programs.
- Mainstream the discussion of using tobacco control, under the framework of FCTC, in achieving SDGs.
- Update data on the effects of tobacco across SDG targets.
- Strengthen government's and other stakeholders' monitoring and reporting system.
- Monitor the threat of new tobacco and vapor products.

### Other recommendations:

#### *On areas of economic growth and employment*

- Pass a progressive, additional tobacco tax at the rates proven to make a promising impact on reducing smoking prevalence.
- Help Local Government Units (LGUs) to localize campaigns against tobacco and smoking by providing capacity building and research. There should also be solid support from government, civil societies, and public against tobacco industries' lodging of legal complaints to LGUs implementing strong anti-tobacco / anti-smoking campaigns.
- Standardize and increase the legal age requirement allowed to purchase cigarettes (also under SDG target).
- Include the burden of tobacco in discussions of poverty alleviation efforts. This surfaces the idea that there are other contributing factors, which are often overlooked that pushes Filipinos to poverty.
- Monitor the shifting of tobacco farmers to other high-value crops and other alternative livelihoods. Reducing the supply of tobacco must go hand in hand with ensuring that tobacco farmers will come up with a better alternative. As such, the reporting points of concerned government agencies should not just cover those who received assistance but also those who partially and/or completely shifted to other forms of livelihood.
- The program should also include the youth to discourage the inter-generational transfer of tobacco technology and farming techniques.

### ***On areas of food production, nutrition, and health***

- To further help those who shifted to high value crops, the government must take initiatives to connect the products to a potential market, which strengthens stability of employment and incomes of those who shifted.
- In coordination with relevant government agencies, assist tobacco farmers to shift to crops that will help achieve desired nutritional gains based on prevailing standards, and eventually help in its distribution.
- Audit the utilization of earmarked funds for tobacco farmers' assistance in tobacco-growing provinces and ensure that there is a continuing public support to hold people liable should there be illegal use of allocated funds.
- Continuously call for higher taxes for tobacco and new tobacco / vapor products.
- Create and finance tobacco control programs, including cessation programs, on a national and local level.
- Update research on health impacts of tobacco, smoking, and secondhand and thirdhand smoke. This should also include new tobacco / vapor products.
- Ensure that generated tobacco funds will go to health and other development programs.

### ***On areas concerning youth***

- Create an updated research and database on the number of child laborers in each sector and sub-sectors.
- Incorporate tobacco-control lessons and programs in the primary school curriculum as part of health promotion.
- Organize extensive campaigns against smoking in the school premises and a stronger drive against purchase and use of cigarettes within a certain area near school premises.
- Include other stakeholders, like parents, CSOs, and LGUs, in crafting and implementing tobacco control policies and programs in schools.

### ***On areas of gender equality***

- Explore the legal remedies of women victims of secondhand and thirdhand smoke in their homes. Consequently, initiate an extensive information drive on how to avail of such remedies.
- Create a database on complaints lodged against secondhand smoke exposure in homes.
- Identify gender-specific risks and gender-specific development strategies in tobacco control<sup>6</sup>.
- Mainstream the discussion of gender-specific risks of smoking and tobacco farming.

### ***On areas of environmental protection and climate action***

- Mainstream the discussion of the environmental damages of the entire cycle of tobacco farming and consumption.



- Determine the extent of water pollution caused by chemical runoff from tobacco farming especially in tobacco-growing provinces.
- Localize and update researches and data on the effects of tobacco farming and littered cigarette butts in the environment – particularly in areas of chemical leaching, wildlife protection, and forest protection.
- Strictly implement smoking ban in public areas to control waste disposal.
- Include tobacco control initiatives in tourism propaganda.
- Assess the carbon footprint in the entire cycle of tobacco farming.

### *On areas of sustainable cities and communities*

- Monitor and localize the research on indoor pollution caused by smoking.
- Study the integration and trade-off between smoke-free places and dangers of smoking inside households.
- Mainstream the campaign against smoking and its importance in fire prevention and other related incidents.

### *On areas of justice and strong institutions*

- Strengthen the implementation of Joint Memorandum Orders that prohibit government officials and employees to transact and partner with the tobacco industry; provide stiffer penal provisions when possible.
- Monitor the CSR activities of tobacco industry to ensure that public opinions will not be swayed by minimal projects.
- Require transparency on the dealings of the tobacco industry in areas of CSR, donations, and the like.
- Create a special, multi-sectoral group to monitor the use of tobacco funds which will include the public, civil society, academe, and the like.
- Ensure that erring officials with allegations on misuse of tobacco funds be made liable.
- Strengthen studies that will prove tobacco control as an accelerator to the achievement of SDGs.
- Improve the participation of the Philippines to international bodies that seek to attain SDGs.
- Highlight the importance of tobacco control to SDGs in the government, public, media, and other stakeholders.

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