

DevPulse

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Bridging Nutrition and Education: Assisting the Poor through the 4Ps

Even without the global crisis, the poorest Filipinos continue to be in dire straits. The government, as a result, is combining nutrition with education as a long-term sustainable weapon against poverty.

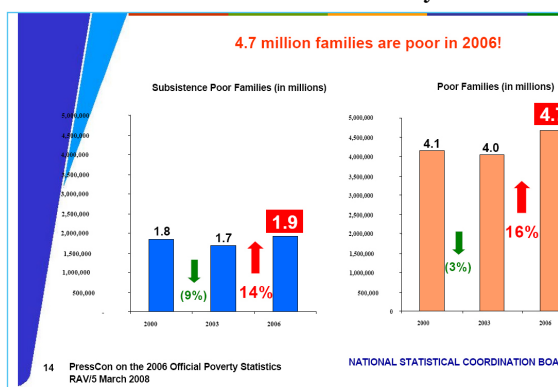
Although individual perseverance makes a big difference in trying to escape from the cycle, in reality, this is not enough. It is very hard for an illiterate to earn his or her daily sustenance, much more to provide dependents with proper education. Often, a kid has to be pulled out from school to help supplement income for the family. And the cycle continues.

The government is now trying to break this cycle by assisting poor families, specifically children and mothers, get health services and ensuring that elementary and high school children attend classes and finish their schooling. Patterned after the conditional cash transfer system

implemented in Africa and some parts of Latin America, the Philippines' *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps) does not only intend to let the poorest Filipino get by but also end circumstances wherein households must choose between food and education.

As part of the 4Ps Advisory Council, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) works with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to reduce poverty by investing in the country's human capital.

Though the 4Ps focuses on individual households, its consequences on social and economic development are clear. It will help address the needs of nine million Filipinos, 10 to 64 years old, who do not have sufficient literacy skills to function in a complex society.¹ It will help relieve some of the estimated 2.9 million families who experience involuntary hunger.² It may lead some of the 4.7 families, who cannot afford the cost of food and other necessities,³ out of the poverty cycle. And ultimately, it will help capacitate and empower them that they may enhance their well-being.



1 According to the 2003 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey as cited by the Handbook on Education for All

2 The First Quarter 2009 Social Weather Survey, fielded over February 20-23, 2009, found the proportion of families experiencing involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months to be 15.5%, or an estimated 2.9 million families

3 According to the 2006 NSCB Official Poverty Statistics presented by NSCB Secretary General Romulo A. Virola on March 5, 2008 at the NSCB office.

Determining the Poorest

The 4Ps was pilot-tested in 2007. In 2008, the Philippine government started to roll-out the program and allotted PhP5 billion a year to provide cash grants to extremely poor households to improve their health, nutrition and education particularly of children aged zero to 14. The budget was raised to PhP10 billion in 2009 when the targeted beneficiaries were doubled to 700,000.

In identifying the beneficiaries, the DSWD starts with the selection of provinces based on their economic conditions. Priority are given to the 20 poorest provinces based on the 2006 Family Income Survey (FIES), the poorest provinces in six regions not in the FIES list, and cities with packets of poverty in the National Capital Region, Visayas and Mindanao.

Municipalities are then chosen from the selected provinces through saturation surveys of households. Afterwards, Proxy-Means Test is used to determine the poorest households based on such socioeconomic characteristics as ownership of assets/appliances, type of housing unit, level of educational attainment of household heads, and access to water and sanitation.

As of January 2009, the program benefits 379,345 households and covers a total of 27 provinces, 12 cities and 148 municipalities.

Grants and Conditions

Under the program, a household-beneficiary can receive PhP500 each month for health and nutrition expenses and PhP300 per month for educational expenses for a maximum of three children. A household with three qualified children can receive as much as PhP1,400 per month or PhP15,000 annually. Beneficiaries may avail of the grants through Landbank cash card or through alternative payment schemes for at most five years.

But these are granted only with compliance with conditions set by DSWD:

- Pregnant women must get pre- and postnatal care, and be attended by a skilled and trained health professional during childbirth;
- Parents or guardians must attend responsible parenthood sessions, mother's classes, and parent effectiveness seminars;
- Children zero to five years old must receive regular preventive health check-ups and vaccines;



4Ps works with the beneficiaries in ensuring their health and education.

- Children three to five years old must attend day care or preschool classes at least 85 percent of the time;
- Children six to 14 years old must enroll in elementary or high school and attend at least 85 percent of the time; and
- Children six to 14 years old must avail of deworming pills every five months.

Compliance with these conditions is strictly monitored by the DSWD and the 4Ps Advisory Council. Failure to meet these conditions entail suspension of cash grants or dropping from the program.

4Ps amidst the Global Crisis

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ralph G. Recto sees the conditional cash transfer scheme, in particular, the 4Ps, as a good stimulant of the economy in these trying times. Not only would it help with the capacity building of the country's human resources, it would also increase market spending. According to Recto, this may prompt demand for services and production of goods thereby securing and even creating jobs.

Secretary Recto also said that it is beneficial that Filipinos are healthy and able as the country faces the challenges presented by the crisis and anticipates opportunities of the morning after.

Sources:
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Dr. Romulo A. Virola, 2006 Official Poverty Statistics, NSCB, March 5, 2008
Secretary Ralph Recto's various presentations on the ERP
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