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Philippines, Factor 16: Education

Education and Food Accessibility in the Philippines

The Philippines is a nation in Southeast Asia and is composed of 7,107 islands. It is divided into three regions: Mindanao, Visaya, and Luzon. After 300 years of Spanish Rule, the Philippines became a United States colony until the Philippine Revolution sought to gain an independent government. In 1946, the Philippines gained its independence from the United States and became known as the Republic of the Philippines. In recent decades, internal conflicts have been hindering the improvement of the country and the people's welfare. Some examples are the dictatorship attempt of Ferdinand Marcos, corrupt government agencies, and the military conflicts in Mindanao with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Apart from the internal conflicts the Philippines is vulnerable to natural disasters: the country is ranked second out of 171 countries in the World Risk Index and second out of 181 countries on the 2014 Global Climate Change (Valentine 2015). Four volcanoes are active in the country; the country has experienced 16 earthquakes in the last decade, and the country experiences flooding and typhoons every year. The political conflicts and the constant threat of natural disaster make the progress of the developing country slow.

As of 2013, the Philippines is estimated to have had a population a little above 98 million (World Food Bank, 2014); and in 2012, 27.9 percent of the Filipino population were living below the poverty line, as taken from a survey by the National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB) (Welch 2013). That means that an estimated 27 million people live in families that generate annual per capita of 9,286 Philippine pesos (186 US dollars), the poverty threshold according to NSCB. Since a huge majority of poor urban families in the Philippines don't generate enough money to buy much as it is, they typically don't own land. Instead, they live in what are called slums. Slums are shelter structures that are made of salvaged material. Because slums are salvaged and built close to sewers and abandoned public property such as the sides of streams or railroad tracks, slums have hazardous and unsanitary conditions (Ragragio 2002).

In poor urban households, family sizes range from five to seven persons. In addition, it is common for Filipino families to have up to five relatives living with them (Ragragio 2002). Because of the little money poor families generate annually, they take on other activities that may bring extra pay to provide for their household. According to the Annual Poverty Indicators Survey, income from work constitutes only about fifty percent while entrepreneurial activity accounts for twenty-five percent of the household income (Ragragio 2002); the rest are from other sources. Most employment is found in production, services, transportation related jobs, and sales. However, the Asian Development Bank and the Metro Manila Urban Services for the Poor (MMUSP) (ADP 1999) both survey that fifty percent of the total labor force are unemployed. This suggests why other activities are relied upon for income besides employment. In sufficiently providing for their families, employment is not enough for poor urban families; rather, other modes of income are needed to supplement the budget

The amount of income poor families in the Philippines generate affects spending choices. On average, forty-five percent of income is spent on food, the next highest percentage are utility bills, and six to ten percent are spent on education (Ragragio 2002). As described, most of the income is spent on food. In most areas food is readily accessible in grocery stores, outside food markets, and in shack or cantina stores that are called "sari-sari stores"; but food is not as affordable with food prices rising. Diet consists of rice, noodles, and fish they can afford, while for some the main option is to find scrap food from restaurants or even in garbage (Eaton 2012). This diet makes the poor prone to sickness and malnutrition. According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, the highest participation of poor urban

students in education is during primary school, and most dropout from secondary education to pursue employment and find a way to help feed the family (Lam 2005). Because of the low income of the poor families, health care may be available, but the costs are way too much in private healthcare systems and the quality of the public healthcare system is bad enough to put patients in greater risk of getting sick (Ragragio 2002). These are some of the great challenges of poverty in The Philippines.

Natural disaster and low availability of quality education are holding improvement in agriculture, the availability for the poor to make a living wage, and gaining access to adequate nutrition. As a side note, political corruption greatly impedes the improvement of society in the Philippines. According to Asterio Saliot, director of the Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Training Institute, in roughly fifteen years, there would be a significant shortage of farmers. In the Philippines, according to the 2012 Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, 70 percent of the rural poor are fishermen and farmers, so many of the younger Filipinos associate farming with poverty. As a result, more and more of the younger generations are moving to the cities to look for more opportunities to have better living, as their parents want them to have a better life. So at large, agriculture is actually deteriorating and the country is not producing enough food to even feed its own population. In 2010 the Philippines was the biggest rice importer worldwide, as rice is the main dish in the country. Ironically, The IRRI, International Rice Institute, is headquartered in the Philippines. Besides the declining number of agriculturists, growing crops is risky as typhoons are common. In helping those in poverty to generate sustainable income, education and employment are important; however, quality education is not readily accessible to the poor and many children from poor families drop out to help the family sustain itself. Because of this, there are less employment opportunities for emerging adults from households that are poor. Alongside the low income of impoverished families is the smaller accessibility to a nutritious diet. Food prices are rising and the country's agriculture is insufficient as it is with a decreasing number of farmers and the recurring typhoons that hit the farms. The two major barriers that are identified in the descriptions above are lack of quality education and the country's vulnerability to natural disasters. The lack of accessible quality schools can be changed to better reach more of the population more effectively, but the weather, however, is beyond the country's control. Only finding ways for better preparedness and new innovations to protect against natural disasters can be put in place to address safety of the people and the crops.

Education addresses both barriers by raising the next leaders and citizens of the country to develop the nation even further. The lack of accessible quality education to poor urban families restricts the employment opportunities to those in the family that are able to work. For the young individual who drops out or doesn't get an exceptional education, it is less likely to get a high paying job because most high wage employments require professional degrees and high academic attainment: the formal employment sector receive the higher end of the salary bracket according to the MMUSP (Ragragio 2002). When poor families start to get employed in workplaces that pay above the poverty threshold, the family will be more able to buy food. There is a huge divide between the lower quality of public schools and the higher quality of private schools. Because private schools offer quality education and are expensive, poor urban families are at a great disadvantage. Also, high dropout rate of children from impoverished households are prevalent because of the immediate need for the family to generate a sustainable income. Children from impoverished households drop out to help provide for the household. However, at large, NSO's 2010 Census of Population and Housing (CPH) shows the Philippines has a literacy rate of 97.5 percent (Desiderio 2013). Generally, trends in education are improving. According to the World Bank, funding for education has almost tripled, elementary participation has increased from 88.58 percent to 95.24 percent from 2005 to 2013, and the "grade 6 mean percentage score in math, science, Filipino, English and social studies improved from 54.66% in 2005 to 66.9% by school year 2012-2013, based on the National Achievement test." These improvements are indicating that efforts are being expended on the development of education in the country. While these changes do improve the overall outlook of education in the Philippines, poor urban families experience a slow improvement in their situation. The changes have only been recent and it takes generations for the change to fully evolve

and finally make a big impact on all families. However, education is improving as the country continues to develop.

By further improving the schools and classrooms and making quality education accessible to every family, the younger generation gets the opportunity to pursue higher education, which would allow for more high salary employment options and social and economic mobility. Poor urban families, by then, have the opportunity to start generating higher income for their family to move out of poverty and provide the needs of each family member better. With better education, children become productive, influential, and collaborative citizens that will represent the Philippines. Education is where leaders, farmers, scientists, and world changers are developed intellectually as a community. With more responsible citizens, society at large collaborate to improve and sustain their environment. Urban dwellers will be able to contribute more to the improvement within their spheres and farmers get the support and tools they need, perhaps even the number of agriculturists may increase with more awareness to the issue of feeding the nation. With improved education, more people are able to contribute to solve issues and to the improvement of their community and country.

Alongside with education, it is imperative to introduce agricultural studies and education. Curriculum that engages students to study material that is relevant to their lives and community, such as biology and crop science. Because of poverty and the regular need for food, it is in the best interest of students to learn about what they can do to help feed themselves and their community. Some curriculum can integrate biology studies with growing crops and the different aspects that can contribute to productive, healthy crops and the resilience of crops to address destructive natural forces. By engaging students in these topics and discussions, they are becoming aware of the food shortage and need to produce food in their country; and it also allows them to think of ways to make a sustainable living that can benefit others and the environment. Though agricultural careers have a bad reputation among families and younger people, we can find ways to gain the attention of the citizens to the food issue and what they can do about it. To do so would need funding for agricultural institutions and marketing to persuade people that agriculture is a needed for a sustainable community. Hiring agricultural researchers and workers in the areas might attract young people to agricultural careers and open their minds that, though it is hard and a risky job, agriculture helps others and that there is more to agriculture than just farming. There is also thinking of ways to systematically grow crops and defend them from destructive storms. Agricultural education must be introduced and supported to address both education improvement, and agricultural shortage.

The high fertility rate and increasing population in a small area of land that makes up the country poses a concern to economists and the government agencies. The country already cannot feed itself and is starting to depend overly on imports. According to the World Bank in 2012, the fertility rate in the Philippines is 3 children per woman. Also, NCSB predicts that by 2040 the population of the Philippines will jump from 93 million to 142 million. It would be a challenge to supply each person in an greatly increasing population, even in ensuring proper education is able to reach most if not the whole population. With unemployment almost half of the labor force, it may become harder to find employment, even with higher education. This makes social and economic mobility uncertain for poor urban families in the future.

To address the education, I suggest that more research can be conducted to find ways to effectively teach children and having the support of the government to encourage students to pursue needed occupations by increasing wages for that occupation. For example it may be best to increase the pay of farmers, so that the association between farming and poverty is broken down; and with more farmers and more education and support for farmers, the country may start to increase crop yield and decrease the dependency from imports. The Millennium Development Goals strives to increase enrolment and participation in primary school, however, most students in the Philippines complete primary school. It is in secondary school that students from poor families drop out to help support the family. In short education in the Philippines has already reached the goal. Investing in school meals and making it available to students, especially those

with the most financial need, may decrease dropout rates. Providing school lunches in school has been shown to decrease the dropout rates in developing country as evidenced in a study about the correlation between school participation and lunches in school (Adelman, S., Gilligan, D., & Lehrer, K. 2008). Having school provided meals give students from low income families reasons to stay and for families to encourage their children to attend school. Also improving teacher training and resources can increase the quality of schools. In training teachers more in education, classes will be conducted with structure and more effectively.

To address the improvement of education and the availability of education to more children, projects that targets street children have been going on locally by numerous organizations. One such project by a German organization, *Kindernothilfe*, runs a project named “Alternative Education Program for Street Children”. The project aims to survey the approximate 25,000 street children in Manila, many of whom have families that sought a better life in Manila only to find that work is hard to get. Most of the children run away from home because of abuse and poverty. To accomplish their goal *Kindernothilfe* works with Childhope Asia Philippines. Social workers are sent to areas where street children are frequently reported and gain their trust until they are able to bring them into their program and classes that school and teach them their rights. The children are also taught about certain dangers such as drugs and disease, in order to foster awareness and decision making. This street education program believes that the lives of the children can be improved through education and hope.

As the leaders of the nation, the national government should pave the way for changes in the country. It would be suggested that the government should continue supporting and investing in education; also the agency should also engage more in school retention. By investing in school meals, it gives the government an opportunity to feed its people and support the participation of children in their education. In turn, the communities should identify the impoverished children and families in their spheres. The community itself should be open to foster a communicative and unified environment in order to move forward in educating children for a better future individually and as a society. By coming together, the community is able to work smoothly to identify problems and solve them. Unification in communities also encourages the formation of structures and organizations within the communities. Roles of corporations are as impactful as the government’s in terms of how they can contribute to change. Corporations, as the powerhouse of the economy, can invest more in non-profit organizations that aim to improve education and the welfare of people. They can also become support systems to endorse education to the people, especially for the children. By investing for better change in Philippine communities, corporations become models for change for the people. It is imperative that citizens of the country work interconnected to support the improvement of the well-being of the nation and its people. It would also be of big help for international research agencies to offer the government and nonprofit organizations knowledge and data in order to apply studies from the academic community to internal affairs, such as the work in the Department of Education and other governmental and non-governmental agencies. In allowing awareness to the government and organizations, research agencies help the country and its communities to better solve issues.

Lastly, it is the participation of individual families forward that will make improvement efforts effective. Rural families and urban families live in different areas of the country and both have distinct qualities. Since most reforms start in the capitol and cities, urban families need to cooperate and not against the efforts to improve the condition of education, which mostly refers to the education of children. It is the family’s role to support their children’s ventures and encourage their children’s participation and engagement. Doing so starts a culture in which personal and professional development is embraced, such that citizens start to involve themselves in community and nationwide issues. As the culture in which education is perceived as the way for social mobility, improvement for a healthy society, and national progress. For urban families, it is also important that they partake in the countries participation to improve education. Many urban families engage in the food market, so finding education that will aware them of

effective ways in their respective areas of agriculture will help. It would allow for formation of innovative ways to prepare against and save crops from imminent tropical storms, typhoons, and natural disasters, in general. Being unified as a country will push improvement faster and more smoothly.

The Philippines is a developing country that is frequently stricken by destructive natural forces such as typhoons. The country is also afflicted by corrupt government officials and inner conflicts like the Islamist resistance in Mindanao. With all these conflicts the government has plenty of issues to handle. The poor, in turn is deeply affected. The factor that is considered in this essay is education. Improving education and making it available to most if not everyone will help individuals and communities make good decisions that will allow for the society to progress. In order to do this, training teachers and investing in school lunches may increase the quality of schools and student participation. Also educated women tend to decide on having less children, which will slow down the fertility rate and make it more sustainable to provide food for the entirety of the population. Education of the population will also foster awareness of the issues the nation is facing such as insufficient food production, which will prompt the increase of workforce in agriculture. As each member and group fulfill their roles, the nation will progress.

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