

Preface

Nobody said putting a book together was easy. Perhaps what made this project a bit more difficult was that different topics were handled by different people, resulting in different writing styles, research techniques, approaches, and ways of viewing things. To paraphrase the old saying, we got different strokes by different folks. But when we started this project, we knew that we were all bound by a common thread—and a common threat. Since we were all part of a network of civil-society organizations, the common thread that bound us was the impetus to contribute to the development debate and to influence government's policy directions. But perhaps the more compelling push for us to get together at this time is the common threat facing us all today -- poverty, which is once more on the rise.

The book starts with what we call the main report, providing a glimpse of the Philippine economy in 2001 with important discussions on poverty and unemployment. The main report echoes an earlier apprehension that the Macapagal-Arroyo Administration might be easily caught up in “short-termism” and neglect to put forward needed reforms that have long-term impact. With general elections coming up in 2004, the administration's political survival and electoral victory appear to be its bigger, overriding concerns at the moment.

The next article presents the framework of the government's “new” rural development strategy, tries to distill what's sound and what's flotsam, in the face of a poverty that has taken on an urban character, yet remains stubbornly pervasive in rural areas after the Asian financial crisis. A number of “doables” present themselves, but so does a great amount of spadework that needs to be done beforehand.

Two topics cover the United Nations' current theme of “Financing for Development.” The Gender and Development (GAD) Budget examines public financing with a gender and poverty lens; it critically puts forward several challenges and recommendations so that the GAD budget might contribute to the realization of gender-responsive governance. The second topic has to do with the impact of devolution on the provision of agriculture and health services, which is examined after the ten-year experience with the 1991 Local Government Code. The exercise has had its downside, such as problems with the Internal Revenue Allotment formula and influence peddling by local politicians, but the writer takes exception to the quick-on-the-draw conclusion that decentralization has been a total failure. The position taken is that it is still too early to say whether re-nationalization of the provision of these services must be resorted to, just because funding has been a major problem.

Capitalizing on the experiences of Social Watch Philippines' network of nongovernment organizations and people's organizations, three case studies are contributed by three member-networks. In an essay on mobilizing social capital for social services delivery, the writer compares and contrasts the experiences of two marginalized coastal communities in Iloilo, one in an urban setting and the

other in a rural setting. The second case study is that of the indigenous peoples of Mt. Kitanglad in northcentral Mindanao and their re-discovery of collective action to overcome their social exclusion while upholding their living traditions. The final case brings us back to local governance, this time highlighting the experience of civil-society organizations in engaging the local government of Baao, Camarines Sur.

From the local, we go global, as an article reviews the progress made and constraints encountered in the implementation of global social commitments to eradicate poverty. In particular, the article looks into the performance of selected countries in the so-called Economic and Social Commission on Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)-9 and coins the word “de-globalization,” which is taken to mean promoting positive globalization—the sharing of ideas, knowhow, resources, goodwill, and hospitality, the free movement of people, and mutual learning among different cultures as a framework for regional cooperation to fight poverty.

Finally, we present what we consider the major highlight of this book. A product of a series of studies to develop an alternative measure of poverty, the Quality of Life Index (QLI) is introduced, with some very interesting discussions on how the QLI is different from other modes of assessing one’s well-being, as well as the results of its provincial estimates.

A most useful annex to this volume is a rich statistical series on social indicators, with provincial breakdown and economic and financial indicators that are national in scope. We likewise present selected Asian cross-country performance on some social and economic indicators.

Poverty is not an easy subject to grapple with. Should this book prove to be a sourcebook providing some handles to the poverty question, it might just contribute to a deeper understanding of what poverty is and, more importantly, how to effectively address it. Then we would have realized our bigger objectives. At the same time, if we have succeeded in providing stimulating and thought-provoking material for researchers, and in stirring up motivation for more to join us in “social watching,” we would consider ourselves amply rewarded in this endeavor.