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Measuring Philippine Development

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Review Article

Measuring Philippine Development

RICARDO G. ABAD

MEASURING PHILIPPINE DEVELOPMENT: REPORT OF THE SOCIAL INDICATORS PROJECT. Edited by Mahar Mangahas, Makati: Development Academy of the Philippines, 1976. 574 pages.

Current work on social indicators provides an information base for government policy and planning, usually through a quantification of the elements comprising social development, social welfare, or quality of life. These efforts began around the late sixties in the United States, and received much attention in the early seventies in Europe and various United Nations agencies. The Philippine interest in this topic started at about the same time. In 1973, the Bureau of Census and Statistics (now the National Census and Statistics Office) published two slim volumes on social development indicators, each one containing some twenty-five to thirty measures on such topics as health, education, employment, consumption, and population. The reports were useful compilations, but the selected indicators were limited to those derived from census data and the existing Philippine statistical system. By comparison, the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) project is of more consequence: it presents more indicators, assesses their merits, links these to specific national concerns, offers time series data, and recommends certain measures absent from the country's statistical system.

The editor, Mahar Mangahas, discusses the project's scope, purpose and limitations in a superb introductory chapter entitled, "The Measurement of Philippine National Welfare." He begins by defining "welfare" as that which refers "to the degree of achievement of the important goals of Philippine society as a whole," and proceeds to consider the ethical and political implications of the definition. Addressing ethical issues, Mangahas discusses the kinds of judgments that researchers made in specifying the components of national welfare, in linking indicators to these concerns, and in choosing the

social groups which are said to share in the total welfare. On the political side, he is emphatic on the need for government to measure its accomplishment of some welfare objective, to assess performance in terms of quantitative targets, and to be accountable to the public on the performance or non-performance of these projects.

Articles II and IV of the Philippine Constitution and the National Economic and Development Authority's Four Year Development Plan serve as guidelines for a project statement of basic Philippine social concerns. These concerns number nine: health and nutrition; learning; income and consumption; employment; non-human productive resources (or natural resources); housing, utilities, and the environment; public safety and justice; political values; and social mobility. Were data available, the list would include two more items, namely national security and working conditions. In turn, such concerns as "monotony of work," "family stability and cohesion," "leisure," "development of the cultural heritage," and "alienation from schooling" are excluded from the list since they become problematic only as Philippine development reaches an advanced stage. But concerns like population and women's participation are omitted entirely. The list may thus elicit criticism in some circles, but as a preliminary effort, the concerns given here are, I think, well chosen.

From the nine basic concerns emerge thirty major indicators and nineteen sub-indicators (not counting decompositions), sixteen of which are experimental in the sense that they are not ordinarily measured in the Philippine statistical system. These indicators are discussed by different authors in subsequent chapters, each one dealing with a specific area of concern. A final chapter entitled, "A Pilot Survey on Social Indicators," written by Georgina K. Ochoa and Cecilia Carreon-Eco, describes the methods used in a survey conducted in Batangas for gathering data to test experimental indicators.

Chapter II reviews social indicators for health and nutrition. The author, Vicente Paqueo, observes improvements in the country's *infant mortality rate* (10 percent lower in 1971 than it was two decades earlier), the *life expectation at birth* (from thirty years in 1918 to sixty years in 1971), and the proportion of reported deaths which are due to "notifiable" diseases (from 57 percent in 1960 to 46 percent in 1971). But the Philippine health picture leaves much more to be desired: the observed rates are still below those found in more developed countries. Nowhere is the health situation more acute than in the area of nutrition. While the average level of food supply has improved during the past two decades, a maldistribution in the *average supply of proteins and calories per capita per day* has created a serious problem of malnourishment, especially among children. A recent study indicates, for instance, that in the sixties, nearly 70 percent of children aged one to four were undernourished in one degree or another. Vigorous efforts in equalizing the distribution of food, a task linked to narrowing in-

come gaps and reducing family sizes, will greatly enhance the country's state of health.

In chapter three, "Indicators for Learning," Ruperto Alonzo shows that the *school enrollment ratio*, an indicator which reflects the degree of accessibility of schooling to the population, has grown rapidly over the past years. This is particularly evident at the elementary level where the ratio jumped from 80 percent in 1952-53 to a saturation point of 100 percent as early as 1963-64. By comparison, from 1950-51 to 1970-71, the ratio at the secondary level increased by 32 percentage points, while that at the tertiary level by 10 percentage points. These trends have several implications, two of which are the enhancement in what economists call the *value of human capital stock*, and, at least on the elementary level, a greater accessibility of formal education. In fact, from the late forties to the mid-sixties, the rate of investment in human capital through schooling has been greater than the rate of investment in physical capital. But while Alonzo happily observes that educational capital is becoming more evenly distributed in the country, he makes little mention of variations in the quality of education, the sex typing of educational courses, and the difficulties arising from a continually rising cost of schooling.

In the next chapter, Leonardo Sta. Romana III raises several points about the country's economic well-being. He first recommends the use of the indicator *net beneficial project (NBP) per capita*, or the amount the government spends per person for education, public health, medical care, labor, and welfare. And then he points out that the gap between NBP per capita and the Gross National Product (GNP) per capita has widened through time, with NBP growing at a much slower rate. This implies that an increasing proportion of the country's total production has been siphoned away from social services in order to accommodate government expenditures needed for the maintenance of the socioeconomic system. More encouraging, the author notes, is the growth of the country's *reproducible capital stock* (buildings and other structures, durable equipment, and inventories), the total amount of productive land, and the number of known mineral reserves. But these gains in non-human productive resources must be balanced with data showing a rapid rate of forest depletion and the increasing concentration of land ownership to a few families. Equally disturbing is the income profile. While *unemployment rates* show gradual decline from 1956 to 1973, the trends in the *real wage rate index* have been dismal: the figures for 1973 were the lowest in the past 23 years and will probably not improve under conditions of rapid inflation. The poor are the most affected for, as Sta. Romana observes, the gap between the rich and the poor, roughly measured by the *ratio of mean income of the richest quintile to mean income of the poorest quintile*, has widened from twelve in 1956 to fifteen in 1971.

The fifth chapter, on Philippine poverty thresholds, reinforces these find-

ings. Using both objective and subjective indicators of poverty, Ma. Alcestis Abrera argues that poverty has worsened through time. In Greater Manila, the proportion of families below the food threshold (or the amount spent for what the Food and Nutrition Research Council recommends as a nutritionally adequate minimum-cost diet) grew from 17 percent in 1965 to 25 percent in 1971; in rural areas, the increase was from 39 to 48 percent for the same years. Moreover, after estimating the total threshold (or the minimum amount a family must earn to maintain basic necessities), she finds that about twenty-two million persons in 1961 and a larger twenty-nine million in 1971 actually earned less than the set minimum. Subjectively, the situation is a little worse: asked whether they considered themselves poor, one out of ten respondents answered affirmatively.

Selected characteristics of the physical environment reflect this poverty. In the seventh chapter, Felipe Medalla and Reynaldo Tabbada show that while there have been modest improvements in the supply of potable water, electrification, and toilet facilities from 1956 to 1970, two-thirds of Philippine dwellings are still overcrowded (i.e., greater than or equal to 1.5 persons per room), and the proportion of squatter shanties in urban areas has increased. The authors do not fully elaborate the demographic determinants of these trends. They are, however, more successful in describing the gradual deterioration of the ecological system. Notable here are the increasing concentration of suspended particulates and carbon monoxide in the city air and the amount of dissolved oxygen levels in urban river systems.

Unfavorable economic conditions, many criminologists conclude, are often associated with higher crime rates. But the seventh chapter, on public safety and justice, prepared by Eleanor Elequin and Barbara Jo Lava, presents a puzzling picture. They find that from 1967-1971, the *crime incidence rate*, defined as the number of crimes reported to police agencies per 100,000 population, has fallen for offenses against persons, property, morals, and order, but not for those against chastity, a crime which claims mostly women as its victims. The authors do not explain this curious trend, but admit that the Philippines, like many countries, suffers from a severe underreporting of criminal offenses. The attempt, in a Batangas pilot survey, to gather perceptual data is more revealing: for while 63 percent of the sample agreed that "most crimes are solved by the police," a 47 percent majority also admit that "you need to know somebody to be able to get help from the police or the PC." At any rate, the lower number of crimes reported to the police may have helped reduce the backlog of pending judicial cases from 1960 to 1973. But these figures hide the greater number of cases not reaching authorities or those which have been settled, fairly or unfairly, out-of-court. The limited coverage of these indicators of public justice has been most disappointing.

Equally disappointing, but in another sense, is Elsa Jurado's chapter on political opportunity and political welfare. The first disappointment comes

from the awareness that under martial rule, such indicators as the *voting turnout ratio* and *voter registration ratio* are insensitive measures of political participation, a fact the author herself admits. A second disappointment comes from a suspicion that the five social psychological indicators of political values, particularly the *Index of Freedom of Political Dissent* and the *Index of Participation in Political Activities*, may no longer have the same usefulness now as they did in 1973 when the Batangas survey was conducted. Martial rule has become more entrenched over time and it seems unlikely that a typical community sample will give the same "responsive" replies as the Batangas respondents did six years ago. This hypothesis deserves a test.

A more promising indicator of Philippine welfare measures the extent to which Filipinos move up or down a hierarchy of positions and states. Jennifer Lauby tackles this aspect in Chapter 9 using data gathered from the 1968 and 1973 National Demographic Surveys. She says that the *index of social mobility* shows a little improvement over time: in general, the respondents' present occupation, operationalized in terms of prestige scores, is slightly better than their fathers. She also observes, applying the *coefficient of openness of occupations*, that this mobility is largely restricted within an occupational stratum; in contrast, movement across strata — from farm to manual or non-manual occupations, for example — has become more difficult. A comparison of scores on the *index of perceived social mobility*, a social psychological indicator, supports this finding: since 1959, people perceive only a minimal degree of upward mobility in the country.

Some social scientists use a similar perception measure of social mobility as a general indicator of overall welfare. Mangahas correctly avoids this, and suggests that the components of national welfare are too complex to be summarized in a single measure. The project's findings support the claim: there are modest improvements in some components (e.g., employment, school enrollment) but stagnation in others (e.g. poverty, price inflation). Moreover, a single composite measure neither forces a government ministry or agency to account for its performance on a specific concern nor allows researchers the opportunity to establish relationships among the different welfare indicators.

The next step, of course, is to convince policy makers of the need to establish a series of social indicators for the country. This is a difficult task for several reasons: first, it will be expensive to integrate these indicators, especially the experimental ones, into the Philippine statistical system; second, there is no assurance that some of these indicators correspond to government priorities; and third, it is uncertain whether ministries or agencies wish to be accountable to the public on these indicators. To my knowledge, the DAP set of indicators has not been sold, *in toto*, to the government. It has generated, however, other attempts to measure and monitor social changes in the country. Two of these attempts are the Population Center Foundation's "Population, Resources, Environment, and the Philippine Future" and the

National Economic Development Authority's "Economic Social Impact Analysis/Women in Development" projects. It is too early to tell what effect these projects will have on government policy and planning, but it is encouraging to know of government efforts to seek quantifiable performance measures. If only to have spurred this interest, the DAP Social Indicators Project has been successful.

Yet the book stands on its own. Its introductory and subsequent chapters are well-researched, well-edited, and carefully presented. It remains a pioneering attempt to describe and quantify the Filipinos' welfare, a valuable reference work for social scientists and planners, and an excellent baseline study to assess future trends. One finishes reading the book, however, with several nagging questions in mind: what are the best solutions to enhance Philippine welfare? What effective mechanisms are there to make these research findings useful to policy makers? What has kept Philippine society intact despite worsening poverty, spiraling inflation, and widening income inequities? Answers to these questions lie beyond the scope of the book, but they do suggest critical directions for Philippine social science research in the years to come.