# Poverty is multi-dimensional

## Discuss with reference to the experiences of at least one emerging economy.

Poverty is multidimensional. Poverty relates not only to economic or financial poverty but also to other experiences or factors including poor health, lack of education, poor living standards, disempowerment, poor work quality conditions, as well as threats from violence (Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative, 2017). This paper shall discuss these multidimensional aspects of poverty in the context of the now emerging country of the Philippines.

The Philippines is an archipelago located in Southeast Asia with a population of about 100,000 million (BBC, 2017). They are a sovereign republic with three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judiciary). They are the only country in Asia largely dominated by Catholicism and Christianity, having been colonized by Spain for about 300 years (BBC, 2017). American influence on the archipelago is however also strong and more recent as the US gained control of the country following Spain’s defeat during the Spanish-American War (BBC, 2017). Japanese forces drove the Americans out of the country during the Second World War, but following the return of the American forces, Americans fought alongside the Filipino guerrilla warriors to regain control of the country (BBC, 2017). After the Second World War, the Philippines gained its independence. It was notably ruled by several strong presidents, including Manuel Roxas, Ramon Magsaysay, and Ferdinand Marcos (BBC, 2017). Marcos declared martial law over the country following student dissidents’ disruptive actions in the streets. Marcos was however responsible for securing major infrastructure all over the country, including bridges, road networks, railways, and numerous medical as well as cultural centers (Aguilar, 1981). Corruption and human rights abuses however marred his 20 year rule. He was deposed in the 1986 and was succeeded by Corazon Aquino (Aguilar, 1981). Aquino helped restore democratic rule in the country following years under Martial Law. No substantial changes in the economy during this time were however noted (Quimpo, 2009). Presidents which followed gradually helped improve the country’s GDP, but not many significant changes were noted in terms of infrastructure, countryside development, health, education, or housing was observed (BBC, 2017). In recent years, investor confidence for the country has been fluctuating especially with the changing political tides and policies, policies which have not translated to consumer confidence (Lopez, 2016). Improvements in the country’s GDP however have been seen in recent years, especially in the past year as the economic policies laid out by presidents Aquino III and Macapagal-Arroyo bore fruit (Lopez, 2016). Data from the Philippines Statistics Authority indicate that the economic growth in 2016 was at 6.8% with a 6.6% GDP from October to December 2016 (Chowdhury, 2017). The 4th quarter was attributed to the numerous typhoons which hit the country during their rainy season (June to October) (Chowdhury, 2017). Major drivers to their growth were in manufacturing, trade, real estate, the industrial sector, as well as income from overseas Filipino workers which are helping increase and contribute to consumer spending (Lopez, 2016). With the newly elected President’s tough stance on criminality, investor confidence and consumer confidence has increased (Chowdhury, 2017). His economic policy which he lays out in his Philippine Development Plan 2017-2020 also reflects well on the country as an emerging country in Asia (National Economic and Development Authority, 2016). His development plans are very much based on government spending on infrastructure, mostly as a measure to bring as much development to the countryside as possible. His *Build Build Build* program for infrastructure involves major improvements in the road network of the Philippines, improvements which have long been considered overdue (National Economic and Development Authority, 2016). Once considered the rising tiger of Asia in the 1970s, this country fell behind its Southeast Asian neighbors. This current Administration’s efforts to catch-up with its neighbors therefore look very promising.

It is undeniable however that while the country is considered a rising and emerging economy, its poverty levels are very much problematic. Rural poverty is a major issue for the Philippines (Sta. Romana, 2017). While the central capital of Manila can boast of bustling businesses and corporations, its countryside is altogether a different story (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2016). Majority of Filipinos (88 million) live in the rural areas and poverty there is severe and widespread especially as work in these areas are often limited to farm work which is usually low paying work (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2016). Farmers are often not the land owners or if they are land owners, they usually have only limited lands to till. Their produce is sufficient only to feed their families or to earn a small income. Fishermen rely on their daily catch to support their families (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2016). Other farm workers work for big and rich land owners who only pay paltry salaries which is barely enough to feed themselves and their families (Sta. Romana, 2017). For each island, there are different causes of rural poverty depending on the possible sources of income in the island or the specific issues which often dominate their region (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2016). The Mindanao Island for instance has been dominated by civil unrest attributed to bandits and rebels raiding villages and disturbing the peace. As the island is also very far from the central government, its issues have not been significantly addressed (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2016). As a result, for the longest time, the issues of poverty in the region have lingered despite the fact that the region is also rich in natural resources.

Another aspect of poverty being faced by the Philippines is poor health. There are numerous health issues in the Philippines, especially issues in relation to the Millennium Development Goals as set by the World Health Organization (UNICEF, 2016). The Philippines has committed to decrease its child mortality by two-thirds (27 per 1000 live births) and maternal mortality by three fourths (52 per 1000 live births) by 2015 (UNICEF, 2016). The Philippines has so far been able to decrease for the past 20 years its under-5 deaths by 50% (UNICEF, 2016). This meant that it was able to address its MDG goal in decreasing child mortalities. However, neonatal deaths have manifested at a slow decline in the previous decade (UNICEF, 2016). Deaths of children under-5 years are still highest in the children in rural areas especially among those with low educational status (UNICEF, 2016). There is also a major inequity in terms of the health services received by those in the rural areas. In most rural areas, there are only a limited number of hospitals, only small clinics with minimal health resources to address complications of pregnancy or childhood illnesses (UNICEF, 2016). Inadequate nutrition is also an issue for many children and Filipinos especially where many children are under nourished due to the family’s inability to access more substantial and nutritious foods. With inadequate nutrition, the issue of poor mental and physical development is also noted among children, with iron and iodine deficiencies being common problems, including stunting and poor performance in school (UNICEF, 2016). The gap with the wealthier communities in the urban areas and the poor in the rural areas is very much significant as the affluent are able to afford more nutritious foods (UNICEF, 2016). The issue in the affluent population relates more to obesity, and its related issues including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and other chronic diseases.

Aside from poor nutrition and health, poverty in the Philippines also relates to poor education. Once again, this is a major issue in the rural areas where there are inadequate schools or where schools are inaccessible to students (Durban, 2012). Children in the rural areas are known to walk for miles, crossing rivers and bridges in order to get to their schools. They recently adopted the K12 system in response to the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) alignment (Durban and Catalan, 2012). This has allowed improvements in their basic education, especially for those who are unable to secure tertiary education (Durban and Catalan, 2012). Issues in resources and facilities in public education is a major issue in the Philippine educational system. There are inadequate infrastructures or schools to house their growing population of students (Durban and Catalan, 2012). In some cases, there are 70 to 100 students crowded in one classroom being taught by one teacher. This situation can be a significant compromise in the quality of education these students are receiving (Durban and Catalan, 2012).

Another dimension of poverty is living standards/housing standards. There is also a contrast in the living conditions of the people in the Philippines, very much like the poor and rich living standards. The rich are very much able to own their lands and build sturdy houses which can withstand the natural elements (Yonson, 2015). The poor however often do not own lands and have to rent rooms to accommodate their families. More often than not, the rural poor fishermen build their unstable makeshift homes near coastal areas in order to accommodate their sources of living (Yonson, 2015). However, during typhoons and similar weather disturbances, it leaves them vulnerable to the elements. This would largely explain the high mortality levels during the 2013 Super Typhoon Haiyan which caused a storm surge reaching up to 17 feet, wiping out makeshift homes, and leaving about 6000 dead and a thousand more still missing (Yonson, 2015). Unsurprisingly, the poor living in unstable, makeshift, and homes made of light materials are often the most affected by weather disturbances like Typhoon Haiyan and the average of 20 typhoons often passing through the country (Yonson, 2015). The country lies at the path where about 20-30 weather disturbances are formed each year. It is also located in what is known as the Pacific ‘Ring of Fire,’ making it vulnerable to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (Yonson, 2015). With high poverty levels significantly affecting the urban and rural poor of the country, the impact of disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons, storm surges, and volcanic eruptions bear the heaviest burden on the country’s poor (Yonson, 2015; Sakai, et al., 2017). Recovering from natural disasters can be difficult for the rural poor because more often than not, their harvests, their homes, and their boats have been destroyed by these disasters (Yonson, 2015).

Poor work quality conditions is also a major issue for the Philippines. Alongside such conditions is the low income often offered as compensation to workers, including professionals. Salaries for professionals in the urban areas, specifically Metro Manila is higher as compared to the other provinces and cities in the country (Faier, 2013). As a result, millions of professionals and other workers are flocking to the capital region to avail of work. This has however increased the urban poverty in the area, and has severely congested the region (Faier, 2013). Its potential as an investment region for BPOs or business process outsourcing has helped provide work to millions of Filipinos (Faier, 2013). The second language of the Philippines is English and it is the language of instruction in their schools. As a result, it has competed well with India as a lucrative region for BPO investors. BPOs are also able to take advantage of the cheap salary they pay workers (Faier, 2013). The increased presence of BPOs in the region however has not stopped millions of Filipinos from leaving the country to be Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). Most of them are domestic helpers, nurses, engineers, construction workers in the Middle East (Faier, 2013). These OFWs have contributed significantly to the country’s consumption economy as billions (26 billion dollars in 2015) are being sent home by OFWs to their relatives (Faier, 2013).

The threat of violence is always an issue in most parts of the world, but more so in poor countries where unlawful elements often fill the streets and an inadequate number of police officers are monitoring the peace and order (Tidwell, 2016). This is also an issue in the Philippines as some poor Filipinos have been addicted to crystal methamphetamine or ‘shabu’. These poor often use shabu to fuel their criminal activities (Tidwell, 2016). Other risks of violence can also be noted in the Mindanao region where rebel forces including the ISIS and Al-Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf group have established a base (Salem, 2016). This group has been involved in bombings, kidnap-for-ransom, beheadings, and the destruction of property in the region (Salem, 2016; Mendoza, Olfindo, and Maala, 2017). In some instances, incidents of harassment and of kidnappings as well as raids have been carried out by this terrorist group on nearby rural villages, often prompting villagers to relocate to other areas or to join these terrorists in their nefarious activities (Salem, 2016).

Based on the above details, poverty can definitely be considered multidimensional. It can come in different forms and manifestations, but to its very core, poverty is still very much about the lack of financial viability to secure one’s home, family, health, safety, security, and peace.

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