

The Evangelical Christian Response to Poverty and Its Impact on Holistic Development of the Poor in the Philippines: A Case Study

KUMAR ARYAL

Abstract

This article examines the effectiveness of evangelical Christian response to poverty and its impact on holistic development of the poor. It focuses on select evangelical Christian churches, non-governmental agencies (NGOs) and international non-governmental agencies (INGOs) that are actively involved in responding to the problem of poverty in the Philippines. The article explores how these evangelical Christians understand poverty, what programs and services they have in response, and how these impact holistic development of the poor. Poverty is usually understood as the condition of people who cannot afford to have their basic needs, both material and non-material, met. This article defines poverty in four different aspects: physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. All four aspects of poverty must be addressed for effective holistic development of the poor.

Kumar Aryal, Ph. D. (kumar4christ@gmail.com) is Professor of Intercultural Studies and Director of Life Mentoring at the International Graduate School of Leadership, Manila, Philippines. He was born and raised in Nepal and served as a missionary pastor in Malaysia prior to serving in the Philippines for the past ten years.

Introduction

Poverty is one of the major problems the world faces today. For many, poverty is mainly an economic, material, political, social and/or mental issue. However, for evangelical Christians, poverty may also be a spiritual issue. Evangelical Christian involvement in poverty alleviation efforts around the world has grown rapidly in the last half century, though its roots go back to the beginning of the 19th century when American Protestant churches started sending missionaries around the world,¹ eventually including to the Philippines.

The Philippines is often called the largest Christian country in Asia and the fifth largest Christian country in the world. According to Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 92.6% of the total population of the Philippines consider themselves Christians.² Christianity in the Philippines is predominantly Roman Catholic. "Evangelicals comprise 12.19% out of the total population of 103,742,000."³ As of 2007, there were over 50,000 evangelical and Protestant churches in the Philippines that were actively involved in socioeconomic arenas through its faith-based organizations.⁴ According to the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC), "there are as many as 60,000 non-governmental organizations registered in the Philippines as of 2017,"⁵ many of which are evangelical Christian NGOs.

¹Andrew Olsen, "Evangelicals and International Aid: Insights from a Landscape Survey of U.S. Churches." (Medford, MA: The Fletcher School, Tufts University, and South Hamilton, MA: The Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2016), 5.

²Pew Research Center. Religion in Public Life. "Table: Religious Composition by Country, in Percentages," December 18, 2012. Online, internet, available from <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in-percentages/>, accessed April 23, 2020.

³Joshua Project, "Country: Philippines," Online, internet, available from <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/RP>, accessed July 15, 2017.

⁴Rodolfo C. Severino and Lorraine Carlos Salazar, "Whither the Philippines in the 21st Century?" (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 2007), 107.

⁵Philippine Council for NGO Certification, "PCNC – Background and Rationale," 2012. Online, internet, available from <https://www.pcnc.com.ph/>

Thus, there have been thousands of evangelical churches, NGOs, and INGOs that have been working on poverty alleviation. However, in spite of the visible response of evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs, poverty remains a critical problem in the Philippines.

According to the Philippine National Statistics Authority's data for 2018, 16.2% of the population live below the poverty line. "This translates to 17.6 million Filipinos ... [who] lived below the poverty threshold estimated at PHP 10,727, on average, for a family of five per month ..."⁶ It is alarming that almost one-fifth of the population in the Philippines is still living under the poverty line. However, neither the national government nor any individual organization alone will be able to solve the problem of poverty in the Philippines.⁷ It will take a collaborative effort of the government, private, and religious sectors, and other international parties involved to make significant progress in poverty alleviation.

Causes of Poverty

Understanding the underlying causes of poverty is the single most important thing to do in responding to poverty. It is impossible to even think of solving the problem of poverty without going to its roots. There are numerous causes of poverty around the world as they vary from one country to other. The causes of poverty mentioned in this article are considered to be the main causes of poverty in the Philippines.

pncn-rationale.php, accessed April 23, 2020.

⁶Claire Dennis, Philippine National Statistics Authority, "Portion of Poor Filipinos was Estimated at 16.6% in 2018." Ref. No. 2019-209, December 6, 2019. Online, internet, available from <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/nid/144752>, accessed April 23, 2020.

⁷Rizalina L. Ababa, "Transforming Lives and Communities: A Case Study on Building Partnerships in the Philippines through Appreciative Inquiry," master's degree paper. The Capstone Collection (Brattleboro, VT: SIT Graduate Institute, 2011), 8.

Widespread Corruption

Widespread corruption, especially in the government system, is one of the main causes of persistent poverty in the Philippines. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), “Corruption has been described as ‘chronic’ in the Philippines.”⁸ Figure 1 shows the ranking of the Philippines based on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index from 2012 to 2018. Transparency International scores 170 plus countries each year to show the level of corruption in their public sector. It uses the scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

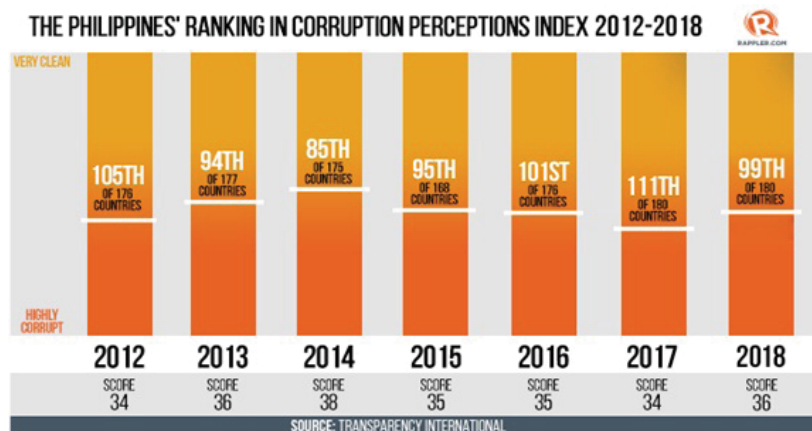


Figure 1. Corruption Perceptions Index

Source: Bueza, Michael. “Philippines Slightly Improves in 2018 Global Corruption Index.” *Rappler* January 29, 2019, online, internet, available from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/222177-philippines-ranking-corruption-perceptions-index-2018>, accessed April 20, 2020.

It is evident that corruption in the Philippines is high, as its average score for the past five years is 35. According to the 2013 National Household Survey on Experience with Corruption in the Philippines,

⁸Asian Development Bank, *Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints and Opportunities* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2009), 55.

poverty exists partly because of corruption.⁹ Ruben C. De Lara, president and CEO of Serving Humanity through Empowerment and Development (SHED) Inc., writes that “[c]orruption and poverty are two sides of the same coin. Ending one can help end the other.”¹⁰

Population Growth

Population growth is believed to be another main cause of persistent poverty in the Philippines. Figure 2 shows the population of the Philippines from 1990 to 2015. The figures are shown in millions and are taken from the particular years when a census was taken.

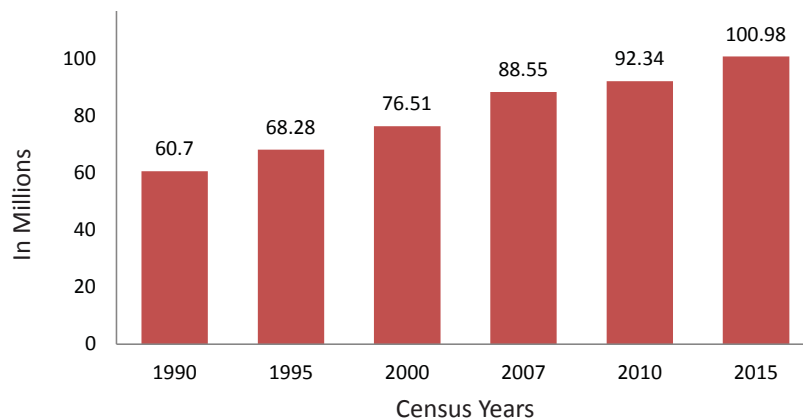


Figure 2. Philippine Population 1990-2015

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority. “Philippine Population (1990-2015).” Online, internet, available from <https://psa.gov.ph/population-and-housing/statistical-tables/2015>, accessed on June 25, 2019.

It is evident that the population of the Philippines has been growing rapidly over the years. If this growth rate continues until 2020, the population will have almost doubled over the span of 30 years. While

⁹Office of the Ombudsman, Research and Special Studies Bureau, “2013 National Household Survey on Experience with Corruption in the Philippines,” October 2014. Online, internet, available from ombudsman.gov.ph/docs/caravan/2013OMBCorruptionSurveyReport.pdf, accessed April 23, 2020.

¹⁰Ruben C. De Lara, “Must We Aim for Ending Corruption and Poverty?” *Manila Times*, February 22, 2018. Online, internet, available from <https://www.>

the population has been growing, the government resources and capabilities have not grown at the same rate. Population growth would not be a problem if the resources and systems were in place to sustain it. Unfortunately, these deficiencies and an unjust political system make it difficult for the poor to get out of their situations and the poverty cycle. Thus, this fast-paced population growth is a cause of the persistence of poverty in the Philippines over the years.

Recurring Natural Disasters

Another factor to consider regarding the problem of poverty in the Philippines is the reality of recurring natural disasters, such as typhoons, volcanic eruptions, and mudslides. Natural disasters are beyond human control, but there are preventive measures that can be taken by frequent disaster victims and by the government. In my experience interacting with slum community members in Metro Manila, the majority come from various provinces as a result being affected by frequent natural disasters. Since most of those affected by natural disasters are predominantly poor people, these disasters force them further into the poverty cycle.

Lack of Education and Financial Literacy

Lack of education is one of the key factors that keeps poverty persistent in the Philippines. According to ASEAN Today, “Though Filipinos have high literacy rates, poverty levels in the Philippines remain disproportionately high.”¹¹ Being literate does not guarantee a way out of poverty, but people do need education in order to get out of poverty. ChildFund International highlights this on its website:

manilatimes.net/2018/02/22/opinion/analysis/must-aim-ending-corruption-poverty/381895/381895/, accessed April 23, 2020.

¹¹John Pennington, “Education, Inequality, Poverty—A Paradox in the Philippines,” *ASEAN Today*, March 22, 2017. Online, internet, available from <https://www.aseantoday.com/2017/03/education-inequality-poverty-a-paradox-in-the-philippines/>, accessed April 28, 2020.

Poverty and education are inextricably linked, because people living in poverty may stop going to school so they can work, which leaves them without literacy and numeracy skills they need to further their careers. Their children, in turn, are in a similar situation years later, with little income and few options but to leave school and work.¹²

There are currently 6.2 million Filipino primary-school aged children who are not in school. Many of them are forced out of school so they can work and help support their families. There are a variety of factors that affect their ability to access education, including the lack of school supplies, lack of teachers, lack of food, and natural disasters. All of these hindering factors are either a cause or a result of poverty.¹³

In addition to the lack of education, lack of financial literacy is another key factor that contributes to the persistence of poverty. “Only 25 percent of Filipino adults are financially literate, a Standard & Poor’s (S&P) Ratings Services survey found, highlighting the challenges facing the goal of boosting access to financial services.”¹⁴

Evangelical Christian Response to Poverty

Evangelical Christians are visible in addressing the problem of poverty around the world, including the Philippines. There are a variety of programs and services that evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs offer in addressing poverty in the country. First, we will explore their understanding of poverty, then we will look at their involvement

¹²ChildFund International, About Us, “Poverty and Education,” online, internet, available from <https://www.childfund.org/about-us/education/>, accessed May 13, 2018.

¹³Save the Children Philippines, Our Work: Education, “Empowering Children through Education,” online, internet, available from, <https://www.savethechildren.org.ph/our-work/the-challenges/education>, accessed May 3, 2018.

¹⁴*The Manila Times*, “Only 25% of Filipinos Financially Literate—S&P,” online, internet, available from <https://www.manilatimes.net/2015/12/02/business/only-25-of-filipinos-financially-literate-sp/232428/>, accessed May 14, 2018.

in addressing the problem of poverty in the Philippines. The summary of both their understanding of poverty and their response to poverty are a result of in-depth interviews done by the author with leaders of select evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs working on poverty alleviation in the Philippines.

Understanding of Poverty and Its Causes

Poverty is generally understood as a lack of material things. All evangelical Christian leaders interviewed defined poverty mainly in economic terms. They explained poverty as a lack of basic needs (food, shelter, and clothing) and a lack of basic services (education, healthcare, and clean water). Poverty is understood as an economic condition where services are lacking and other needs are not met. Underdevelopment, malnourishment, hunger, and lack of education are forms of poverty.

Many evangelical Christian leaders defined poverty in spiritual terms in addition to their economic definition. They described poverty as spiritual brokenness. It is a result of broken relationships with God. Poverty is never God's intention. It is the consequence of sin. The implication of this definition could possibly be that only people without a right relationship with God are poor. It could also imply that Christians should not be poor as it is not God's intention. Poverty is also defined as a result of the fallen state of man. It falls right into the agenda of Satan. Poverty is presumed to be a reality of the fallen nature of man and there is nothing much that can be done about it. Spiritual definitions of poverty reveal the reality that poverty is the result of human sinfulness.

Some evangelical Christian leaders defined poverty in psychological terms in addition to their economic and spiritual definitions. They understand poverty as powerlessness. One of them explained powerlessness as, "no access to productive assets, no access to institution services, and no ability to influence decisions that affect their lives." They believe that this powerlessness results in the poor becoming even poorer while the rich are getting richer. It was interesting that none of the evangelical Christian leaders mentioned the social aspect of poverty. All of them defined poverty in economic, spiritual, and psychological terms but not in social terms. It is apparent that very few evangelical Christian leaders realize the psychological needs of the poor, and none of them realize the social needs of the poor. So their

programs and services responding to poverty focus primarily on the economic and spiritual aspects of poverty.

When asked about the causes of poverty, all the evangelical Christian leaders interviewed mentioned the corrupt and unjust political system of the country as a common cause of poverty. Moreover, 70% said that this system is also the main reason why poverty is persistent in the Philippines. Twenty percent talked about the price increases in basic commodities and the constant struggle of farmers as adding to the persistence of poverty. They mentioned that government structures and policies are not favorable to the poor, and these widen the gap between the rich and the poor in the country. The unjust political system keeps poverty persistent because it is favorable to the rich. Corruption is evident in almost all levels of the government.

Some of these leaders referred to recurring natural disasters as major causes of poverty in the Philippines; while none referred to population growth as one of the causes of persistent poverty in the Philippines, existing research data shows that population growth is one of the key causes.

Providing Programs and Services

Since evangelical Christians in the Philippines are visible in addressing the problem of poverty, the author asked the interviewees, "How is your church, NGO or INGO addressing the problem of poverty?" In response, all of the evangelical Christian leaders discussed their programs and services providing for the basic needs of the poor. Their main programs and services are: feeding programs, medical missions, giving scholarships, providing school supplies, and alternative learning systems. It is apparent that most of the evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs interviewed are responding to poverty by providing for the immediate needs of the poor.

The majority of them also said that they respond to poverty by providing educational programs and services. They talked about the Alternative Learning System (ALS), vocational training, and livelihood programs in helping the poor. These programs are designed mostly for out-of-school youth as well as adults and geared towards jobs. It is presumed that the majority of evangelical Christians are investing in the education of the youth who come from poor families. One of

the evangelical Christian leaders is empowering these next-generation leaders from poverty by teaching music. They seem to believe that there is hope in education.

Many evangelical Christian leaders mentioned programs and services that are designed to nurture the poor spiritually. They are upfront in their spiritual programs and services and mention this aspect even before they begin their work. Their spiritual activities include Bible studies, values formation classes, prayers, and visitations. Half said that they integrate spiritual activities in all of their programs and services. One of the leaders mentioned the importance of responding to poverty by teaching and preaching about poverty in evangelical Christian churches in order to mobilize people for poverty alleviation efforts. It is presumed by these leaders that, in one way or another, all evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs interviewed are addressing poverty by meeting the spiritual needs of the poor.

Some of the evangelical Christian leaders discussed disaster risk reduction and emergency response as part of their primary responses to poverty. This requires skills and personnel. They respond to natural calamities to provide immediate humanitarian aid, and they also provide disaster risk reduction training in natural disaster-prone areas in the country. It seems the majority of the INGOs are involved in immediate disaster response and ongoing disaster risk reduction training. One of their primary foci as INGOs is to serve in a disaster-prone country. They have the resources, skills, and experience in providing such services.

Reconciling Poor People with God

All evangelical Christian leaders interviewed mentioned that a relationship with God is the primary biblical solution to the problem of poverty. God is the solution to all problems, and that includes poverty. They further added that the problem of poverty cannot be fully solved unless people are reconciled with God. This understanding has led them to put God as the foundation in responding to poverty and to include spiritual programs and services in their poverty alleviation efforts. Some of them talked about the need to share Christ with poor people to align them back to God. While others discussed helping the poor find hope and right perspective in life as a result of their response to poverty.

The majority of these leaders said that proclamation and demonstration must go hand-in-hand. They alluded to the idea of a coin that has Good News on one side and good work on the other. The biblical response to poverty is both spiritual and physical. It is presumed that evangelical Christians are to do good work and share the Good News without separating the two. They said that Jesus' ministry was full of feeding, healing, caring, saving, forgiving, and associating with the poor and sinners. Therefore, it is necessary to present both physical and spiritual help to meet the needs of the poor.

One of the leaders quoted the Great Commandment from the Bible (Matt 22: 37-40) and suggested that loving God must result in loving the poor. If we say we love God, but we do not love poor people around us, then we do not really love God. Loving the poor should also result in sharing with them. If we say we love the poor, but we do not share our resources for their needs, then we do not really love them. Another leader pointed out that responding to poverty is not just giving things; it is about giving care and support to other human beings. Poor people are also created in the image of God, and they deserve our love, care, and compassion.

The Impact of the Evangelical Christian Response to Poverty

There is no doubt that the evangelical Christian response to poverty is making an impact in the lives of poor people in the Philippines. Now, we will evaluate the impact of evangelical Christian response to poverty based on the assessment done by the poor people regarding their development. These assessments were gathered by the author through Focus Group Discussion with people from some of the poorest communities who are the beneficiaries of programs and services offered by evangelicals. The impact of evangelical Christian response will be presented in light of the economic, psychological, social, and spiritual development of the poor.

Economic Development of the Poor

“At its most basic level, economic development is the process through which a community creates material wealth and uses it to improve the well-being of its members.”¹⁵ About half of all people who participated in focus group discussions mentioned that they have had significant economic development as a result of programs and services offered by evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs. One of them said, “Before we used to borrow from ‘5-6 people.’ [Indian nationals who work as Loan Sharks.] If we borrow 2,000 pesos, we would have to pay 2,400 pesos in a week.”¹⁶ The person is now a beneficiary of an NGO that provides loans with a very minimal interest rate to start a business, to provide education for their children, to build a house, and so on. It is evident that their financial situation has become better.

It was encouraging to hear about the financial awareness they now have as a result of programs and services conducted by evangelical Christians in their communities. They have learned to save for emergencies, buy necessary things only, spend wisely and share with others who don’t have. These are valuable lessons in terms of handling money. It is apparent that they will apply these lessons when they have money. Some, who are working part-time jobs, shared about their experience of being careful in saving for their future. Most participants consider the programs and services that deal with the physical aspect of poverty to be the most helpful for them in their current situation.

Psychological Development of the Poor

Almost all the beneficiaries talked about their significant psychological development as a result of programs and services offered by evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs. One third of them talked about the change in their perspective in life and hope for their future. They are learning to let go of their “once poor, always poor” mindset. The

¹⁵Marcelo M. Giugale, *Economic Development: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

¹⁶Kumar Aryal, Focus group with the beneficiaries of Savings and Cooperative (a project of the Center for Community Transformation), January 17, 2018, Sta. Monica, Novaliches, Quezon City, Philippines.

majority of them gave responses and shared their opinions, which in itself is a proof that their psychological situation has changed. Giving a voice to the poor can be the most helpful thing to do for their psychological development.

The poor come from very poor family backgrounds, and the majority of them have a poverty mindset. One of the female beneficiaries said, “We have our own identity now.”¹⁷ She was referring to running her own business and making money compared to being dependent on her husband for everything. One of the woman commented, “Before we were just housewives; now we are small business owners.”¹⁸ It is evident from their sharing that evangelical Christian response is not always about just giving them fish but also about teaching them how to fish. The mindsets of these poor people seem to have changed, and they seem to feel empowered as a result of the programs and services offered by evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs.

Social Development of the Poor

Many beneficiaries shared about their social development as a result of the programs and services of evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs. They mentioned how they have been able to get to know each other and share their journeys to help each other grow through the weekly gatherings, worship services, and small groups. Some of them said that they have new friends and more time to bond with each other. These programs have also offered places where they worship God and fellowship with each other. Aside from finding new friends, they have also found friends in their communities as people see changes in their lives. One of them said, “I am [sic] elected as the president of [the] women’s group in my community.”¹⁹ This shows that people are

¹⁷Kumar Aryal, focus group with the beneficiaries of the Community Managed Savings and Credit Association (a project of World Vision Philippines), January 24, 2018, BASECO Barangay Hall, Port Area, Manila, Philippines.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Aryal, focus group with beneficiaries of the Savings and Credit Cooperative.

relational beings, and they need relationships with each other for their development.

Some of them also talked about their good relationships with their families and friends at school resulting from the values they have learned. They have learned to work hard. They have found good company to be with and a good environment to learn good habits. One of the young participants said, "If we were not here [in one of the NGOs], we would be with other friends doing drugs or playing video games."²⁰ Through the programs and services of evangelical Christians, they have found a place where they can belong. It seems that social development has resulted from the programs and services focused on their spiritual development.

Spiritual Development of the Poor

Almost all of the beneficiaries said that they have experienced significant spiritual development as a result of the programs and services of evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs. Some of them have learned to pray and to do devotions at home. Others have also learned to put their faith into action. One of them said, "Faith without work is dead."²¹ Almost all of them said that they have grown spiritually since they started involvement in programs and receiving services by evangelical Christians. They talked about the habits of prayer and reading God's Word that they have learned. They all go to local churches every Sunday and are involved in church activities. It is apparent that many of them have been a good testimony to the people around them.

They learn about God, about God's love for them, and about hope in God. They enjoy fellowships, small group meetings, and worship services where they learn about God and His Word. Those who have not accepted Jesus into their lives yet are still finding out more about God. These poor people seem sincere in their spiritual growth. Their

²⁰Kumar Aryal, focus group with the beneficiaries of Sparrow Music Learning Center (a project of Sparrow Music, Inc.), January 25, 2018, Sitio Lupang Pangako, Payatas B. Quezon City, Philippines.

²¹Kumar Aryal, focus group with beneficiaries of the Savings and Credit Cooperative.

willingness to learn and grow is genuine. They seem to be spiritually hungry and, in turn, they have been well fed by the evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs. Meeting these spiritual needs is perceived as the real solution to economic poverty; therefore, it is emphasized in the evangelical Christian response to poverty.

A Holistic Development Framework

A holistic development framework is an approach to understand poverty and to respond to it in a comprehensive manner. This framework defines poverty in economic, psychological, social, and spiritual terms and proposes an intentional integration of economic, psychological, social, and spiritual development. The goal of holistic development is



Figure 3. Holistic Development Framework

Source: Adapted from Bruce Wydick, "Economists Discover Holistic Development: And 5 Reasons Why It's Likely More Effective." *Across Two Worlds*. June 29, 2015. Online, internet, available from <http://acrosstwoworlds.net/?p=357>, accessed January 17, 2018.

shalom.²² A holistic development framework will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of evangelical Christian response to poverty and its impact on the holistic development of the poor in this case study of the Philippines. Because these four kinds of poverty are interrelated with each other, the response to them should be integrated as well. When poverty is understood and responded to in a holistic manner, poor people experience *shalom*, which is the ultimate goal of holistic development.

Different Kinds of Poverty

People usually understand poverty as primarily an economic condition. It is the state of not having enough money to buy basic necessities. While this is certainly one aspect of poverty, it does not capture its full significance and scope. There are also other kinds of poverty that people are facing today. In this article, we will look at four different kinds: economic poverty, psychological poverty, social poverty, and spiritual poverty.

Economic Poverty. Though poverty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, it is usually defined in economic terms. People are poor because they lack the resources to get the things they need. Economic poverty is the lack of basic necessities for material well-being. Some of these basic needs are food, clothing, housing, clean water, land, and other assets. The most common definition of poverty comes from the World Bank which considers poverty as a situation where a person is living below the income of \$3.20 per day and extreme poverty as a situation where a person is living below the income of \$1.90 per day.²³ The World Bank comes up with these figures based on the average poverty line in the world's 15 poorest countries. Economic poverty

²²*Shalom* is a Hebrew word with a comprehensive meaning, including peace, wholeness, completeness, soundness, health, safety, and prosperity, carrying with it the implication of permanence. A fuller examination of the word is found later in this article.

²³World Bank Group, "Poverty and Equity Brief: East Asia & Pacific–Philippines," October 2019. Online, internet. available from https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/FM2019/Global_POVEQ_PHL.pdf, accessed April 28, 2020.

usually affects the psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of a person.

Psychological Poverty. Janse van Rensburg, in his article “The Psychology of Poverty” writes,

When investigating the phenomenon of poverty, the question is not only why people are poor, but also, and most importantly, why people remain poor. Why is it that poverty seems to keep people in some kind of psychological bondage from which they are unable to escape?²⁴

Psychological poverty is the state of having an unhealthy and poor frame of mind. It reduces the confidence of people in themselves. Poor people tend to believe not only that they are poor, but that they will remain poor. This mindset has a long history that goes back thousands of years and is strongly rooted in the minds of the psychologically poor. It cannot be blamed on an economic downturn, and it cannot be solved overnight. Psychological poverty is usually self-inflicted. If a person has a poverty mindset, then he/she is the only person who can pull him/herself out of it.²⁵

A study done by Warwick University claims that poverty has a significant negative effect on cognitive ability. It is equal to losing a full night of sleep. Mental poverty hinders the ability to make positive choices and shackles the poor to an endless cycle of poverty. Dr. Anandi Mani, professor at Warwick University, shows that it is the flaw of poverty, not the poor, that creates the poverty trap. He notes,

The poor, in this view, are less capable not because of inherent traits, but because the very context of poverty

²⁴Johan Janse van Rensburg, “The Psychology of Poverty.” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, February 28, 2013, (1): 1, online, internet. available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274128709_The_psychology_of_poverty, accessed April 20, 2020.

²⁵Canice Parker, “Mental Poverty and Factors of Poverty - Reasons for Famine,” January 12, 2012, online, internet, available from <https://ezinearticles.com/?Mental-Poverty-and-Factors-of-Poverty---Reasons-for-Famine&id=6818109>, accessed March 29, 2017.

imposes load and impedes cognitive capacity. The findings, in other words, are not about poor people, but about any people who find themselves poor.²⁶

Social Poverty. Social poverty is also understood as relational poverty. It can affect anyone regardless of race, gender, age, or socioeconomic status. It is a form of poverty far more destructive than economic poverty. Relational poverty is a deep lack of the connectedness with others that people need for their well-being. People are turning to virtual communications more than face-to-face interactions, but even the most advanced communication technology cannot close the gap of relational distance.²⁷ That is why Bryant Myers proposes that poverty is primarily relational and that its cause is predominantly spiritual. He then goes on to write,

[T]he poor are poor largely because they live in networks of relationships that do not work for their well-being. Their relationships with others are often oppressive and disempowering as a result of the non-poor “playing god” in the lives of the poor.²⁸

Globalization and labor markets have made social poverty a common experience of people in developing countries, including the Philippines. According to the data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) in 2013, there were approximately 9.5 to 12.5 million Filipinos working in other countries, which is around 10-11% of the total population of the nation.²⁹ They are usually called

²⁶Anandi Mani, Sendhil Mullainathan, Eldar Shafir, and Jiaying Zhao. “Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function,” *Science* 341 (6149, August 30, 2013): 980.

²⁷Maia Szalavitz and Bruce D. Perry, *Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential—and Endangered*. (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2010), 292.

²⁸Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 787.

²⁹Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, “OFW Statistics: A Compendium of OFW Statistics,” 2013. Online, internet, available from <http://www.poea.gov.ph/ofwstat/compendium/2013.pdf>, accessed April 29, 2020.

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). OFWs have scattered throughout various countries and cities for better opportunities. This creates loneliness, marital problems, parenting issues, identity crises, and other social problems in Philippine society. Though remittances from OFWs play a vital role in sustaining the Philippine economy, they create social poverty in the long run.

Social poverty also involves social exclusion, which is being excluded from social, economic, cultural, political arenas. In her chapter “The Concept and Measurement of Social Exclusion” Ruth Levitas defines social exclusion in this way:

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.³⁰

Spiritual Poverty. On the subject of spiritual poverty, Matt 5:3 is a passage that usually comes up in evangelical Christian contexts. It is one of the few verses in the New Testament that seems to provide a definitive statement on poverty by Jesus himself. Despite this, many people have wrestled with what being poor in spirit really means. According to BDAG, when he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” the Greek word, *ptōchoi* “poor” in this context implies “lacking in spiritual worth.”³¹ Jesus called this a “blessed” condition because it helps people to draw closer to God.

³⁰R. A. Levitas, “The Concept and Measurement of Social Exclusion,” in Christine Pantazis, David Gordon, & R. Levitas, eds., *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain: The Millennium Survey*, pp. 123–160, (Bristol, UK: Policy Press. 2006), 123.

³¹Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literatures*. Third Edition, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 2000), 896.

Spiritual poverty is the state of incompleteness before God. When people experience neediness, incompleteness, and dependency, they often become overwhelmed. Thus, spiritual poverty is the cure for narcissism, self-righteousness, and other problems human beings face. When people see their brokenness, they do not feel better about themselves; instead, they feel that something is terribly wrong within themselves. In fact, it does not matter whether they have problems or struggles in life or not; they still need God. People need God's grace and mercy. However, not everyone is aware of his or her neediness. For those who are aware of their neediness, Jesus described them as "poor in spirit." That is why Anne Bradley and Art Lindsley write,

the issue is not poverty per se, but rather the attitude of humility and reliance on God that it can produce in us. That's why Matthew's version of the beatitude isn't just 'Blessed are the poor,' but 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'³²

***Shalom*: The Goal of Holistic Development**

What comes to our mind when the word *shalom* is spoken? Is it absence of war, a sense of calm, an absence of conflict? The word *shalom* is usually translated as "peace" in English. But translating *shalom* into one word alone will not give the full depth and richness of its meaning. There is no English word that can effectively convey the depth behind the concept of *shalom* in the Bible. *Shalom* is a beautiful classical Hebrew word, transliterated as *šālôm*. The triliteral root it derives from, *ŠLM*, means variously in its different verbal stems, "to be completed, ready ... to remain healthy, unharmed ... to keep peace ... make restitution ... to recompense, reward to restore ... to finish ... to deliver up ... to be at peace."³³ In short, the concept and the scope of *shalom* is holistic.

³²Anne Bradley and Arthur W. Lindsley, eds., *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*. (Bloomington, IN: WestBow, 2014), 18.

³³Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, et al., "*ŠLM*," *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol 4, (Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, 1994), 1532–1533.

Understanding the meaning and scope of *shalom* is very important for evangelical Christians in responding to poverty in a holistic manner. When evangelical Christians respond to poverty physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually, poor people will experience *shalom*. These four aspects are interconnected, and they affect each other. If the response to poverty is focused only on one aspect of poverty, then people will still be poor in other aspects. Thus, intentional and integrated response to all four areas is essential for the poor to experience *shalom*.

How Should We Then Respond to Poverty?

When the economic, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of poverty are addressed in an integrated manner, poor people will experience *shalom*, which is the goal of holistic development. Evangelical Christian response to poverty should be intentional in all four areas of development in order to achieve the goal of holistic development of the poor. The recommendations below are based on the in-depth interviews with the evangelical Christian leaders and focus group discussions with poor people who have benefited from their programs and services. The recommendations are intended to encourage evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs to respond to poverty in a comprehensive manner.

Empowering the Poor

According to Social Weather Station’s survey in 2017, “47 percent of the national population of the Philippines consider themselves poor.”³⁴ Since poverty is usually rooted in the mindset of the poor, there has to be a psychological response to poverty. There seems to be an underlying assumption among evangelical Christians that the economic and spiritual response to poverty will result in psychological development of the poor. Thus, the focus has typically been on meeting the physical

³⁴Mara Cepeda, “Filipino Families Who Consider Themselves Poor Rise to 10.9 M,” *Rappler*, December 2, 2017. Online, internet, available from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/190164-sws-self-rated-poverty-survey-september-2017>, accessed April 29, 2020.

needs of the poor and sharing the Gospel. Most of the evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs interviewed are giving aid as their response to the problem of poverty in the Philippines. However, while aid is necessary, it should not be a long term response because it dependency on the side of the poor. Instead of giving aid to the poor year after year, evangelical Christians should think of helping them become self-sustainable over the years.

In terms of the process of empowering the poor, God's empowerment of Gideon in the Bible to be an agent of transformation serves as an example (Judg 6-8). Empowerment begins with articulating the needs of the poor along with affirmations of strength and opportunities. One of the first steps is to help people identify their problems. Thus, there should not be pre-packaged analyses; instead, evangelical Christians should facilitate people's participation in analyzing their own situations.³⁵ Many churches, NGOs, and INGOs have been feeding the poor, running orphanages, and distributing relief goods for many years. Evangelical Christians need to focus on empowering the poor to fish for themselves instead of giving fish for a prolonged period of time.

Partnering with Government

According to the Asian Development Bank, "the state's response to poverty is crucial in terms of how deeply and quickly poverty can be reduced."³⁶ Indeed, government plays a very important role in alleviating poverty. However, in the context of the Philippines, "poor people are often at the mercy of systems created by the powerful. Hence, poverty-alleviation efforts need to address both broken systems and broken individuals, using highly relational approaches wherever possible."³⁷

³⁵Samuel Jayakumar, "He Has Filled the Hungry with Good Things: The Church's Solidarity with the Poor," in Lee Wanak, ed., *The Church and Poverty in Asia* (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature, 2008), 60-61.

³⁶Asian Development Bank, *Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints, and Opportunities*, 62.

³⁷Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishing, 2015), 171.

According to the Asian Development Bank, "Political dynasties that are dominant in the local government positions are usually associated with corruption."³⁸ Thus, there is a great need for evangelical Christians to partner with the government in both national and local levels to help transform those corrupt and broken systems.

Evangelical Christians have a very minimal partnership with the government in terms of their poverty alleviation efforts. It is presumed that evangelical Christians usually go directly to the poor to avoid a long government process and not to let the government officials pocket the money that should go to the poor. Thus, there is a need for transformation in the government system and evangelical Christians can play a vital role in that transformation. Since evangelical Christian churches, NGOs and INGOs interviewed work very closely with the poor, there is a need for them to partner with the government agencies. Such partnership helps in complementing the programs and services of the government. In addition, government officials will be able to witness Christian love in words and in actions. As a result, government officials and the various branches of the government they serve will experience transformation.

Collaborating with Others

Local churches are concerned that many NGOs and INGOs are not partnering with a local church when they do their projects and provide services. Samuel Jayakumar, one of the contributors in the book, *The Church and Poverty in Asia*, writes about the need for evangelical Christians to come together as brothers and sisters to respond to needs of the poor. Throughout the Bible, God reveals his concern and compassion for the poor. It is a clear indication of what Christians should be doing for them. The local church should be seen as the largest NGO or INGO in the world. Likewise, NGOs and INGOs should be viewed as a part of that church to carry out its mission. Thus, the collective body of Christ has a great responsibility to respond to the needs of the poor.³⁹

³⁸Asian Development Bank, *Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints, and Opportunities*, 96.

³⁹Jayakumar, "He Has Filled the Hungry with Good Things: The Church's Solidarity with the Poor," 74.

There seems to be a need to form an umbrella organization to bring all evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs that are working to alleviate poverty in the Philippines.

This organization could provide strength as churches, NGOs, and INGOs become more aware of each other's work, resources, and personnel. With proper collaboration, beneficiaries of NGOs and INGOs can be easily channeled to a local church for their continual spiritual growth and fellowship. Likewise, beneficiaries and members of the local churches could be able to volunteer with NGOs and INGO efforts in their community. Indeed, collaboration and coordination requires both time and resources, but they are necessary in order to come up with well-designed programs and implement them effectively. Therefore, I would recommend a better coordination among evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs in order to have a better collaboration in responding to poverty.

Conclusion

A holistic development framework proposes that the four kinds of poverty are connected with each other. Thus, to deal with all four kinds of poverty, there is a need for an integrated response that includes economic, psychological, social, and spiritual development of the poor. Evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs should be intentionally involved in responding to the economic, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of the poor. However, the majority of the evangelical Christian churches, NGOs, and INGOs are involved only in addressing the economic and spiritual needs of the poor. Evangelical Christians must also respond to psychological and social needs.

It is easy to do a feeding program once a week, give away used clothes once a month and organize a Christmas party once a year for the poor in their communities. However, to provide effective holistic ministry among the poor requires much intentionality, effort, and an adequate workforce. Preaching the gospel to the poor (Matt 11:15; Luke 4:18) as Christ did is a very important aspect of responding to the spiritual needs of the poor. However, Jesus also fed the 4,000 and the 5,000 and did various ministries responding to the physical and spiritual needs of the people. He ate with sinners and tax collectors, and he accepted them as they were. He taught his followers and helped

them understand who he is and why he came. Jesus responded to the needs of people in a holistic manner.

William Carey, considered the father of modern missions, has set a great example on how evangelical Christians should respond to the needs of the people in a holistic manner. In addition to preaching and planting churches in India, Carey worked on reforming the cultural systems and empowering the people through his advocacy and writings. Speaking out against the caste system, protesting *sati* (a practice among Hindus in India that burns a widow to death on her husband's pyre), teaching agriculture, and building systems of higher education in India are examples of his holistic response to the needs of the people in India. He integrated all of these activities with his evangelistic efforts in order to help in the comprehensive development of the people.⁴⁰

Lastly, evangelical Christians are still a very small group compared to the majority Roman Catholic population in the Philippines which has also been responding to poverty over the years. Therefore, evangelical Christians should neither solely take credit for poverty alleviation nor take blame for the persistence of poverty in the Philippines. Instead, they should continue to respond to poverty by focusing on holistic development of the poor.

References Cited

Ababa, Rizalina L.

- 2011 "Transforming Lives and Communities: A Case Study on Building Partnerships in the Philippines through Appreciative Inquiry." Master's degree paper. The Capstone Collection. Brattleboro, VT: SIT Graduate Institute.

Aryal, Kumar

- 2018 Focus group with the beneficiaries of the Savings and Credit Cooperative. A project of the Center for Community Transformation. January 17, Sta. Monica, Novaliches, Quezon City, Philippines.
- 2018 Focus group with the beneficiaries of the Community Managed Savings and Credit Association. A project of World Vision

⁴⁰Al Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*. (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2008), 22.

- Philippines. January 24, BASECO Barangay Hall, Port Area, Manila, Philippines.
- 2018 Focus group with the beneficiaries of Sparrow Music Learning Center. A project of Sparrow Music, Inc. January 25, Sitio Lupang Pangako, Payatas B, Quezon City, Philippines.
- Asian Development Bank
- 2009 *Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints and Opportunities*. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2009.
- Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, Wilber F. Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker
- 2000 *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literatures*. Third Edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bradley, Anne R. and Arthur W. Lindsley, eds.
- 2014 *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*. Bloomington, IN: WestBow.
- Bueza, Michael
- 2019 "Philippines Slightly Improves in 2018 Global Corruption Index." *Rappler*, January 29. Online. Internet. Available from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/222177-philippines-ranking-corruption-perceptions-index-2018>. Accessed April 20, 2020.
- Cepeda, Mara
- 2017 "Filipino Families Who Consider Themselves Poor Rise to 10.9 M." *Rappler*, December 2. Online, Internet. Available from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/190164-sws-self-rated-poverty-survey-september-2017>. Accessed April 29, 2020.
- ChildFund International
- 2018 About Us: "Poverty and Education." Online, Internet. Available from <https://www.childfund.org/about-us/education/>. Accessed May 13, 2018
- Corbett, Steve and Brian Fikkert
- 2014 *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishing.
- De Lara, Ruben C.
- 2018 "Must We Aim for Ending Corruption and Poverty?" *Manila Times*, February 22. Online. Internet. Available from <https://www.manilatimes.net/2018/02/22/opinion/analysis/must-aim-ending-corruption-poverty/381895/381895/>. Accessed April 23, 2020.
- Dennis, Claire
- 2019 Philippine National Statistics Society. "Portion of Poor Filipinos Was Estimated at 16.6% in 2018." Ref. No. 2019-209, December 6, 2019. Online. Internet. Available from <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/nid/144752>. Accessed April 23, 2020.

- Giugale, Marcelo M.
2014 *Economic Development: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Jayakumar, Samuel
2008 "He Has Filled the Hungry with Good Things: The Church's Solidarity with the Poor," in Lee Wanak, ed., *The Church and Poverty in Asia*, 73-90. Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature.
- Joshua Project
2017 "Country: Philippines." Online. Internet. Available from <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/RP>. Accessed July 15, 2017.
- Koehler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner, et al.
1994 "*ŠLM*." *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Volume 4, pp. 1532–1533. Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Levitas, R. A.
2006 "The Concept and Measurement of Social Exclusion." In Christine Pantazis, David Gordon, and R. Levitas, eds., *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain: The Millennium Survey*. Studies in Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
- Mani, Anandi, Sendhil Mullainathan, Eldar Shafir, and Jiaying Zhao
2013 "Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function." *Science* 341 (6149, August 30): 976-980.
- Myers, Bryant
1999 *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Office of the Ombudsman
2014 Research and Special Studies Bureau. "2013 National Household Survey on Experience with Corruption in the Philippines," October. Online. Internet. Available from ombudsman.gov.ph/docs/caravan/2013OMBCorruptionSurveyReport.pdf. Accessed April 23, 2020.
- Olsen, Andrew
2016 "Evangelicals and International Aid: Insights from a Landscape Survey of U.S. Churches." Medford, MA: The Fletcher School, Tufts University, and South Hamilton, MA: The Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.
- Parker, Canice
2012 "Mental Poverty and Factors of Poverty - Reasons for Famine." January 12. Online. Internet. Available from <https://ezinearticles.com/?Mental-Poverty-and-Factors-of-Poverty---Reasons-for-Famine&id=6818109>. Accessed March 29, 2017.

Pennington, John

- 2017 "Education, Inequality, Poverty—A Paradox in the Philippines." *ASEAN Today*, March 22. Online. Internet. Available from <https://www.aseantoday.com/2017/03/education-inequality-poverty-a-paradox-in-the-philippines/>. Accessed April 28, 2020.

Pew Research Center

- 2012 Religion & Public Life. "Table: Religious Composition by Country, in Percentages." December 18. Online. Internet. Available from <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in-percentages/>. Accessed April 23, 2020.

Philippine Council for NGO Certification

- 2012 "PCNC – Background and Rationale." Online. Internet. Available from <https://www.pcnc.com.ph/pcnc-rationale.php>. Accessed April 23, 2020.

Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

- 2013 "OFW Statistics: Compendium of OFW Statistics," 2013. Online. Internet. Available from <http://www.poea.gov.ph/ofwstat/compendium/2013.pdf>. Accessed April 29, 2020.

Philippine Statistics Authority

- 2019 "Philippine Population (1990-2015)." Online. Internet. Available from <https://psa.gov.ph/population-and-housing/statistical-tables/2015>. Accessed on June 25, 2019.

Rensburg, Johan Janse van

- 2013 "The Psychology of Poverty." *Verbum et Ecclesia*, February 28, 34 (1): 1-10. Online, Internet. Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274128709_The_psychology_of_poverty. Accessed April 20, 2020.

Save the Children Philippines

- 2018 Our Work: Education. "Empowering Children through Education." Online. Internet. Available from <https://www.savethechildren.org.ph/our-work/the-challenges/education>. Accessed May 3, 2018.

Severino, Rodolfo C. and Lorraine Carlos Salazar

- 2007 *Whither the Philippines in the 21st Century?* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Szalavitz, Maia and Bruce D. Perry,

- 2010 *Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential – and Endangered*. New York, NY: William Morrow.

The Manila Times

- 2015 "Only 25% of Filipinos Financially Literate – S&P." *The Manila Times*, December 2. Online. Internet. Available from <https://www.manilatimes.net/2015/12/02/business/only-25-of-filipinos-financially-literate-sp/232428/>. Accessed May 14, 2018.

Tizon, Al

2008 *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*. Regnum Studies in Mission. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International.

Wanak, Lee, ed.

2008 *The Church and Poverty in Asia*. Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature, Inc.

World Bank Group

2019 "Poverty and Equity Brief: East Asia & Pacific – Philippines." October. Online. Internet. Available from https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/FM2019/Global_POVEQ_PHL.pdf. Accessed April 28, 2020.

Wydick, Bruce

2015 "Economists Discover Holistic Development: And 5 Reasons Why It's Likely More Effective." *Across Two Worlds*, June 29. Online. Internet. Available from <http://www.acrosstwoworlds.net/?p=357>. Accessed January 17, 2018.