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CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
PUBLIC POLICY MONOGRAPHS

Social Protection for All Filipinos

Can the Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022 Deliver?

RENE E. OFRENEO
RAQUEL CASTILLO

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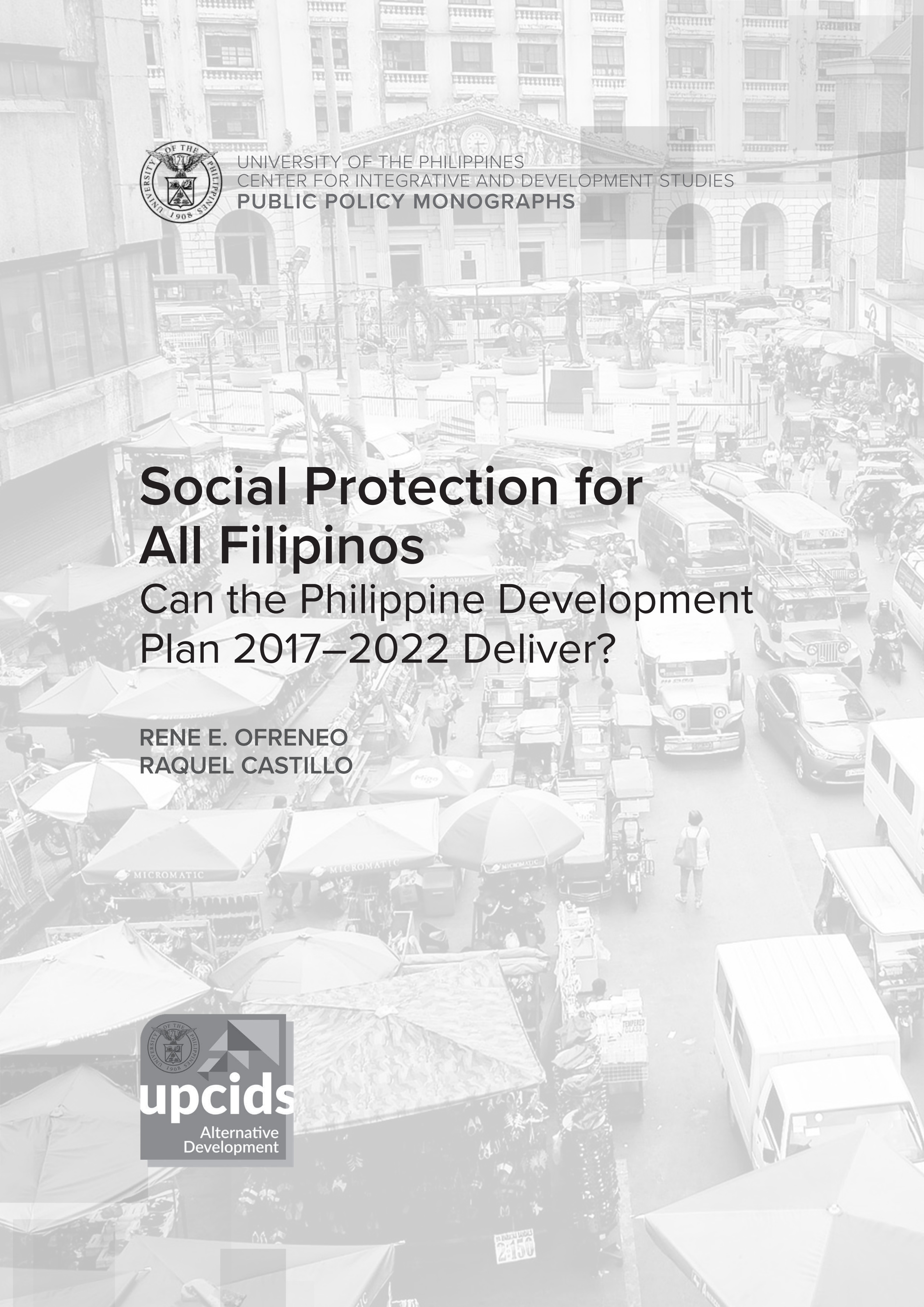
Alternative Development



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Social Protection for All Filipinos

Can the Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022 Deliver?

Introduction: Can the PDP 2017–2022 help reduce poverty and secure social protection for all?

Similar to previous administrations, the administration of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte has declared poverty reduction, inclusive growth, sustainable development, and better life for majority of Filipinos as the goals of its governance. The National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) has even unveiled a formidable 25-year vision for Philippine development called *AmBisyon Natin 2040* (NEDA 2017).

Under *AmBisyon Natin 2040*, the Philippines aims to become a high-income economy by 2040. In quantitative terms, this means the country's present gross national product (GNP) per capita of around USD 4,000 shall rise to USD 13,000 for every Filipino by 2040, placing the Philippines among the world's developed countries. Incidentally, in 1975–1976, the World Bank already labeled the Philippines as a "middle-income developing country," but unlike its neighboring Asian economic tigers (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong), the country was "trapped" in the middle-income rut for the last four decades.

How would a developed Philippines look like by 2040? If the *AmBisyon Natin 2040* will be asked, it will feature a society where no one is hungry and poor, and where everyone can go to college, seek treatment in times of sickness, find jobs locally, has a house and a modern lifestyle. At the same, the country is envisioned to be a world leader in science (ibid.).

Under this vision, there will be zero poverty and the Philippines shall become a "middle-class" society. The NEDA's Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017–2022 describes this as follows:

> The Filipinos' vision for the Philippines in 2040 is a prosperous, predominantly middle class society where there is equality of opportunities and poverty has been eradicated. It will be a society where people live long and healthy lives with a higher life expectancy at birth of 80 years. Longevity will be enhanced by the ability of individuals and communities to withstand natural as well as man-made shocks and disasters. With smarter and more innovative people, the country in 2040 is also envisioned to be a major player in the global knowledge economy, producing innovative products and processes that are used to make high-quality goods and services at competitive prices. The Philippines will be a high trust, more caring,

> and peaceful society where human security is assured and government enjoys the people's trust because it is clean, efficient, and service-oriented. High trust will also prevail between the private sector and the government, as well as between and among peoples. Overall, a high trust society will facilitate official and business transactions, and smooth interpersonal relations.
>
> On the kind of life they want for themselves, Filipinos want a life that is strongly-rooted, comfortable, and secure: *matatag, maginhawa, at panatag*." (NEDA 2017, 3)

Based on the foregoing goals of *AmBisyon Natin* 2040, NEDA crafted the Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022, which "aims to lay a stronger foundation for inclusive growth, a high-trust society, and a globally-competitive economy toward realizing the vision by 2040" (ibid., chap. 1: 7). Like the previous medium-term Philippine development plans (MTPDPs) under past administrations, it outlines the government's development policies, programs, and priority projects, including reform measures and legislative proposals for the economy, education, peace and order, environment, health, arts and culture, and science and technology, among others. However, in contrast to previous MTPDPs, the present PDP clusters all these development areas under three pillars of governance: *malasakit* (enhancing the social fabric), *pagbabago* (inequality-reducing transformation), and *patuloy na pag-unlad* (increasing growth potential) (ibid.).

Pressing questions and concerns

For many people in civil society, the government's goal of achieving zero poverty and a better life for all in a more prosperous Philippines by 2040 is music to the ears. It seems that no one can oppose or go against the end targets of the development planning that the NEDA has set for the country under the PDP 2017–2022.

However, there are questions that immediately come to mind with regard to the aspirational goals outlined by the government. First, can these goals be realized? Second, how can these be attained? Third, are the development instruments, particularly the development policy framework and strategy, adopted by the government through the PDP 2017–2022 and *AmBisyon Natin 2040* the most appropriate in achieving the promises of poverty reduction, inclusive growth, sustained development, and better life for all—both in the medium- (until 2022) and long-term (until 2040)?

This study seeks to answer these questions in two parts: first, the macroeconomic framework and policy of the PDP 2017–2022 and *AmBisyon Natin 2040* will be given a closer assessment, and second, potential gaps in how the government is planning to meet the development requirements of the people will be analyzed based on selected social indicators.

This two-level assessment-analysis is done using the perspective of civil society organizations (CSOs) on social protection (SP). For DIGNIDAD, a coalition of CSOs seeking to promote a "life of dignity" for all, social protection should be universal, comprehensive, and transformative.

On universal, comprehensive, and transformative social protection

The right to a life of dignity and well-being is a basic human right that all citizens should be able to enjoy. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in 1948 states that:

> Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and

> cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. (United Nations n.d.a, Article 22)

Similarly,

> Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. (ibid., Article 23)

The 1987 Philippine Constitution echoes the UDR through its Preamble and its various provisions. But in particular, Article II (State Policies), Section 9 provides for the following:

> The State shall promote a just and dynamic social order that will ensure the prosperity and independence of the nation and free the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, promote full employment, a rising standard of living, and an improved quality of life for all.

Social protection means that every person has a right to full social and economic guarantees and consists of all elements and measures that would assure that every member of society is able to live a life of dignity from infancy to old age. SP means that a person has protection against risks such as accidents, illnesses, disability, and unemployment, among others. SP also means that protection is extended to victims—whether individuals, families, or communities—of disasters, economic shocks, dislocations, and similar tragic events.

The right to social protection is a right that ensures the enjoyment of interconnected rights towards a life of dignity and security by every member of society. DIGNIDAD believes that these rights are comprehensive and universal. They should include, in particular, the following:

(1) Secure, decent and sustainable work and livelihood;

(2) Free and quality healthcare;

(3) Free and quality education up to tertiary level, including access to life-long learning facilities;

(4) Socialized, safe and decent housing;

(5) Access to clean, reliable and affordable water and power;

(6) Adequate, safe and affordable food;

(7) Adequate, reliable and affordable public transport system; and

(8) Living pension for older persons, and adequate income support for children, persons with disabilities, the unemployed and calamity victims.

In addition, comprehensive SP should include the following rights to ensure peaceful and dignified life at the community and societal levels:

- Essential community infrastructures;
- Clean and healthy environment;
- Voice on matters affecting the citizenry and governance of the community; and
- Citizen’s access to a fair and just system of redressing grievances.

To sum, SP must be *comprehensive*, which means that it should protect and strengthen all necessary aspects and elements in order to ensure that a person is able to live a life of dignity. These rights to SP should neither be provided nor withheld on a whim or delivered in a piecemeal manner.

SP must also be *universal*, meaning that it should cover everyone and not just a section or segment of the population. It should also be enjoyed by indigenous peoples (IPs), migrants, and refugees.

To give life to SP, all supporting programs and projects should be reflected in the legal and budgetary system of the state. If a certain SP program in a particular area or aspect of life is needed, appropriate executive and legislative policy measures, especially budgetary measures, should be formulated to make the program effective and mandatory. The Philippine Constitution itself forcefully mandates the state to develop a comprehensive and fully operational SP program.

SP must also be *transformative*, that is, it should lead to the empowerment of the people as the principal actors—and not passive objects—of development. Finally, SP must be redistributive, meaning that it should help address economic and social justice issues; in particular, the root causes of poverty and marginalization which put people in precarious and disadvantaged situations.

Social protection and the macroeconomic policy of the PDP 2017–2022

Understanding the relationship between SP and macroeconomic policy requires a closer reading of the thrusts of the PDP 2017–2022 and an inquiry on the performance of the economy under the development program of previous PDPs/MTPDPs. The analysis is presented through a series of directional questions as outlined below.

Is macroeconomic policy central in addressing SP challenges in the Philippines?

A good explanation or answer to this question can be found in the second chapter of the previous PDP 2011–2016 of former president Benigno Aquino III's administration (NEDA 2011). It summarizes macroeconomic policy as follows:

> Growing output and employment are the preconditions for progress in almost all social and economic aspects of development. Productive employment and rising incomes for the vast majority over a long period can do more to combat poverty decisively than any direct assistance government can ever provide.
>
> It is private actors—from the smallest self-employed entrepreneurs to the largest conglomerates—that create productive jobs and incomes. Government's responsibility however—through fiscal and monetary policies—is to create an environment for vigorous economic activity, as well as to ensure that enough gains from growth are set aside for larger social purposes or channeled into social investments that facilitate future growth. These objectives are achieved by government decisions regarding the size and direction of public spending and taxation (fiscal policy) and by decisions regarding the control of the nation's money supply (monetary policy). (ibid., 36)

Simply put, the government's macroeconomic policy seeks to:

- Spur growth to promote higher national development and increased employment and incomes for the majority;
- Encourage private actors (from the smallest entrepreneurs to the largest firms) to invest and expand the economy;
- Have stable monetary and balanced fiscal (i.e., revenue raising and spending) policies supportive of growth and private investments; and
- appropriate the gains from the foregoing for social purposes and future growth (ibid.)

BOX 1
Who is against social protection? Or, why winning SP is an uphill battle

It is difficult to find someone who opposes social protection (SP). No political leader, be it at the local or national level, wants to be caught spouting statements against SP. In fact, SP for the poor, needy, marginalized, and downtrodden masses easily becomes a powerful organizing instrument for populist leaders in order to win elections. But once elected, populist politicians either forget the promises that they made, or lose the political will to institute the needed SP measures. In many cases, it is the latter that hinders the institution of SP policies, which is reinforced by bad economic and political advice that come either from elite political patrons or neoliberal economists who assume that the market—if left to its own devices—will automatically promote growth, employment, and poverty reduction.

The reality is that the battle for the recognition, institutionalization, and observance of SP has been an uphill one throughout past decades—and centuries even. The uphill battle for recognition is best illustrated by the battle of trade unions and peasant organizations for labor and land rights.

In the case of trade unions, the battle for formally recognized labor rights has been ongoing for over a century now (Ofreneo 2020). In 1902, Isabelo de los Reyes and members of the Union Obrera Democratica demanded from American Governor-General Howard Taft the recognition of protection for workers, including the right to eight-hour work and the right to express their grievances. These were denied by Governor-General Taft, who summarily put de los Reyes to jail. These workers' rights were only recognized three and a half decades later, in 1936, as President Manuel L. Quezon tried to contain the percolating social and labor-peasant unrest throughout the so-called "Red Decade" of the 1930s. Similarly, the rights to collective bargaining, minimum wage, and social security were instituted by the post-war Philippine government in the early 1950s, mainly on the instigation of American political advisers who were worried about the possible resurgence of Communist-led labor and peasant organizations that they helped crush from 1950 to 1952. From the 1960s up to the present, succeeding protective labor laws and welfare programs were adopted by the government in response to militant labor protests, which are supplemented by the advocacy work done by a number of CSOs. Today, trade unions still have their hands full in fighting for basic labor rights such as the right to have security of tenure and the ending of the prevailing practice of contractualization.

In the case of the peasantry, the battle is equally complex, prolonged, and excruciating. For more than three centuries, the militant peasantry battled the Spanish *conquistadores* and their *cacique/inquilino* partners to assert land, community, and other rights. The numerous pocket rebellions against Spain culminated in the Philippine Revolution of 1896–1899. Under American rule, the peasantry battled for the fair distribution of friar lands. With land injustices continuing, many joined the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, Socialist Party of the Philippines, and various other *pulajanes* groups that sprouted in different parts of the archipelago in the 1920s and 1930s.[1] In the 1950s, the government, after crushing the Huk guerilla movement and its mass peasant organization, pushed for

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[1] There are numerous documentations of the land situation and agrarian revolts under Spain and American colonial rule. One of the best books written on Spanish and American colonialism is Renato Constantino's *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (Quezon City: Tala Publishing, 1975).

tenancy sharing reform in the rice and corn sector and for land colonization in Mindanao. In 1972, the Martial Law government, which was out to win the peasantry, abolished share-cropping tenancy and launched the land transfer program in rice and corn farm lands. In 1988, President Corazon C. Aquino, responding to the pressures of the organized peasantry who helped put her to power in 1986, grudgingly adopted the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), covering all crop lands all over the archipelago. But the CARP's realization has been subverted by the government's slow-paced implementation, limited capacity-building programs for land beneficiaries, resistance by the landed elites, and anti-farmer "deregulation" programs espoused by neoliberal economists (Ofreneo et al. 2016). At present, the majority of CARP-covered farmers—both those who have received their titles and those who have not—have remained poor and are struggling to have a life of dignity.

As seen through history, the point is that the institutionalization, or at least the recognition, of social protection and its supporting programs has not been easy. The battle for each SP program—for instance, free but adequate healthcare—does not end when the formal policy and enabling laws have been secured, as these should be backed by proper budgetary support and sustained implementation and monitoring.

Similarly, the role of the organized masses and the broader civil society movement is critical in the acceptance and oversight of SP programs. For example, CSOs played a leading role in exposing the plight of indigenous peoples (IPs) and eventually, in the passage of protective laws such as those recognizing their right to ancestral domain. Another example is the instrumental role of trade unions and CSOs in the passage of laws protecting domestic/household workers and in giving assistance to the elderly. The CSOs also helped expose the abject lack of social and labor protection for home-based workers and street vendors and get the attention of concerned government agencies such as the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and local government units (LGUs).

Overall, the CSOs and various peoples' organizations (POs) have been at the forefront of the struggle for SP in various areas of life such as health, education, and community wellness, among others, as well as for SP needs of certain sectors or segments of the population, including the elderly, children, mothers, persons with disability (PWDs), and so on.

One major problem that POs and CSOs have to confront is the neoliberal biases of some government economic planners. Neoliberal thinking has dominated Philippine economic policy formulation since the 1980s, with the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The neoliberals have pushed for three policy thrusts under so-called structural adjustment programs (SAPs): privatization of government corporations and services, deregulation of various sectors of the economy, and liberalization of trade and investment regimes.[2] Advocates of SAPs and of the broader neoliberal paradigm known as the "Washington consensus" argue that SP programs, if there are any, should be funded by the beneficiaries themselves. For example, social security should be based solely on the contributions of the paid employees enrolled in

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[2] For a detailed account of the adverse impact of SAPs on industry and agriculture of the Philippines, see Fair Trade Alliance's *Nationalist Development Agenda: A Road Map for Economic Revival, Growth and Sustainability* (Quezon City: Fair Trade Alliance, 2006).

the Social Security System (SSS). This means only SSS members shall enjoy pension when they are older, while millions of non-SSS members who cannot afford the contributions are simply left to the care of their poor families and have an uncertain future.

But POs and CSOs have never stopped engaging the government in addressing the unequal and one-sided outcomes of SAPs and global economic integration and in highlighting the neglected SP concerns of the people. Low incomes, lack of decent jobs and livelihood, and unequal access to resources and opportunities are real struggles of majority of people. Eventually, the World Bank (WB) itself, which welcomed privatization of SSS in the 1990s, has adopted a revisionist posture in relation to SP.[3] A number of current DSWD programs are funded by WB loans, including the KALAHI-CIDSS[4] program and the conditional cash transfer (CCT) program that provides Php 1,400 monthly to the poorest households. Clearly, these programs would not have been instituted without the advocacy work of POs and CSOs. Similarly, the numerous advocacy efforts and dialogues of civil society formations with the government sooner led to the creation of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) and the adoption of a broader definition of social protection by national government agencies such as the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), DSWD, and DOLE.

Overall, SP should be comprehensive. But given the political and economic realities in an unequal Philippine society, the organized masses, together with POs and CSOs, have to fight for SP literally on a program-by-program basis, as can be gleaned from the previous historical sketch.

SP should also be universal, meaning that there should be no exceptions or limitations in the availability of SP. In this regard, there is some progress in the education sector. However, civil society groups are still pushing (as of this writing) for full and universal healthcare[5] and social insurance coverage for all—whether paid employees or non-regular and informal workers, and including those that are in society's margins.

In their advocacy for SP, civil society has found an ally in the United Nations, which calls on its member states to develop programs to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Unfortunately, the Philippines failed to meet most of the MDGs, particularly the goal of halving poverty by 2015.

Today, the Philippines has committed to the more ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Like the NEDA's *AmBisyon Natin 2040*, the SDGs target zero poverty. However, the target year for the full realization of the SDGs is 2030, not 2040. Aside from zero poverty, the other sixteen SDGs are:

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[3] In the 1980s and 1990s, at the height of the "Washington Consensus" predominance in global economic circles, the World Bank, with the support of a number of transnational corporations, tried to push for the world-wide privatization of pensions. When he became Chief Economist of the World Bank in 1997–2000, Joseph Stiglitz questioned the privatization program. See an account of pension privatization in Mitchell A. Orenstein's *Privatizing Pensions: The Transnational Campaign for Social Security Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[4] Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan–Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services

[5] Republic Act No. 11223 or the Universal Health Care Act was recently signed into law by President Rodrigo Duterte in February 2019.

- Zero hunger and sustainable food production;
- Good health for all at all ages;
- Quality education and lifelong learning for all;
- Gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls;
- Quality water and sanitation for all;
- Affordable and reliable energy for all;
- Decent work for all;
- Inclusive and sustainable industrialization, including infrastructure;
- Reduced inequality and sustained income growth for bottom 40%;
- Inclusive and sustainable cities and human settlements;
- Sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- Positive action in combatting climate change and impacts;
- Conservation and sustainable use of marine resources;
- Protection and sustainable use of ecosystem and forests;
- Inclusive institutions and access to justice for all; and
- Partnership for sustainable development. (United Nations n.d.b)

These SDGs have gained the support of most POs and CSOs. The problem, however, is how UN member states like the Philippines can actually achieve these goals. How can they be met if social and economic inequality is deep and persistent?

This is the reason why DIGNIDAD is also advocating for SP that is transformative and is linked to needed social and economic reforms. More specifically, SP programs cannot and should not be developed and implemented without connecting them to the broader challenge of making society more equal, more inclusive, and empowering for the poor. Hence, SP programs should go side by side with the adoption of critical social and economic reforms. For example, SP assistance for poor farmers should be partnered with a program to transform farmers into modern and progressive producers. In the case of IPs living in forested lands, assistance in securing their rights over their ancestral land should be partnered with programs on sustainable livelihood and community development, as well as their transformation from being forest dwellers to forest keepers.

In short, SP is all about putting people at the center of development. Under transformative SP, people should be put at the center of economic planning at all levels of governance (i.e., community, local, and national). In other words, SP is not simply asking the government to fund an SP program. It is also asking how SP beneficiaries can be empowered and how the government can—in the long run—be liberated from allocating special funds for the poor as poverty should have been reduced or eliminated. This means that CCT as a centerpiece of poverty reduction and SP efforts should cease. This, however, should not mean that SP spending be lessened. It simply signifies that overall SP spending shall be focused on the enjoyment of comprehensive and universal SP by everyone and in ensuring that measures are adequate and appropriate in meeting the requirements of a life of dignity for every Filipino.

In short, macroeconomic policy is all about having a stable economic development framework in order to promote vibrant and balanced economic growth to reduce poverty and raise national development at a higher level. Critical in enabling this development framework is the formulation of a development strategy and economic planning aimed at economic growth by encouraging investments from private actors.

Clearly, macroeconomic policy and its various components are indeed central in addressing SP challenges in the Philippines. But two questions arise: (1) Do we have the right enabling development framework and development strategy?; and (2) Do we have the appropriate monetary and fiscal policies, as well as policies on the distribution of the gains from growth for social purposes and future growth?

Is the PDP 2017-2022 biased for the poor and supportive of SP? Does it have programs for SP?

The quick answer is that in terms of its stated or declared goals, the PDP 2017–2022 is pro-poor and pro-SP. As outlined earlier, both the *AmBisyon Natin 2040* and the PDP 2017–2022 have openly and amply articulated that the principal goals of governance are the creation of jobs, the reduction of poverty (to zero by 2040), and the attainment of higher quality of life for all Filipinos.

No right-thinking Filipino will object to these development goals. However, it should be pointed out that the previous administration's PDP 2011–2016 and the different MTPDPs from the Marcos period (1970s) up to the Arroyo administration (2000s) also have the same development goals in their respective macroeconomic blueprints for the economy.

One difference is that each administration tries to add on to various SP programs launched by their predecessors, mainly in terms of additional budget or the initiation of new programs. The Duterte administration does both. At this point, one only has to go over Chapter 11 of the PDP 2017–2022, which has a long list of SP programs targeted for further enhancement, expansion, or even universalization.

There are proposals for the 100 percent "universalization" of healthcare coverage by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) and for social pension for senior citizens.[6] The government has listed SP programs for various sectors or segments of society that are considered vulnerable such as poor children, women, PWDs, indigenous peoples, and older persons. The PDP 2017–2022 also recognizes the economic risks faced by overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their families, by workers in the informal sector, by contractuals or "precarious workers" in the formal sector, and by victims of natural disasters.

In addition, the government seeks to further enhance or strengthen other existing SP programs, including social insurance programs administered by the Social Security System (SSS) and the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), the PAG-IBIG Pabahay Program and housing loans, income and livelihood support for disadvantaged groups, senior citizen medicine and food discounts, rehabilitation services for disadvantaged groups, food programs for poor schoolchildren, DSWD's KALAHI-CIDSS assistance for poor barangays, relief programs for victims of disasters, microfinance re-lending programs, assistance to indigents by the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO), and benefits for solo parents, among others.

Of course, the government's centerpiece program is the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) or the conditional cash transfer (CCT) program, which the PDP 2017–2022 seeks to also further enhance, because it has allegedly lifted millions out of poverty. Under the plan, the government is moving towards a regime of "universal social protection" (USP). Also, the budget plan calls for an expansion of SP spending from three to five percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) by the end of the plan period or by 2022. This is close to what the International Labor Organization (ILO) deems as the minimum budgetary spending for universal "social protection floor," which is six percent of the GDP (Hagemejer and Behrendt 2008).

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[6] The current social pension for senior citizens is Php 500 monthly. There are bills in Congress seeking to double this amount to Php 1,000 monthly.

Furthermore, the PDP 2017–2022 seeks to align some of the SP goals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. The plan declares unequivocably that the government intends to achieve USP, and for this purpose, the government will "institutionalize the social protection floor" (NEDA 2017, chap. 11: 15) and will develop a medium-term SP plan for the said floor. In 2012, the ILO adopted Recommendation No. 202 or the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, which defines SP floors as "nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion" (ILO, n.d.). To make the floor work, the Recommendation reminds ILO member states to observe, among others, the following guiding principles:

- universality of protection;
- adequacy and predictability of benefits;
- non-discrimination;
- social inclusion, including those in the informal economy;
- legal guarantees;
- progressive realization; and
- coherence with social, economic and employment policies.

Finally, it should also be pointed out that under the Duterte administration, government spending for education has increased. Basic education is generally free and those who go to private schools get allowances through vouchers issued by the Department of Education (DepEd). Similarly, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) has been providing enrollees in technical and vocational courses vouchers to cover the cost of their training. A historic addition to education provision is the passage of the law providing free tuition for students of state universities and colleges (SUCs).

Is the government turning social democratic? Are we now moving towards the social and economic arrangements in Canada, Australia, and in many countries in Europe where citizens facing adversities in life—such as work disability, illnesses, and so on—are guaranteed social and economic protection? In the most developed SP systems in welfare states, the budget for SP is usually above 20 percent of their respective GDPs. Thus, in Canada, for example, an ageing couple who have to undergo dialysis twice a week due to kidney problems need not worry about the cost of medical treatment and even the fare for going to and back from the hospital.

Incidentally, the PDP 2017–2022 also lists unemployment insurance and subsidies covering insurance for the informal sector as part of the country's priority legislative agenda. The former entails the enactment of a law to guarantee income security during sudden unemployment, while the latter denotes the universalization of social insurance coverage. Both proposals are major hallmarks of a welfare state.

All the SP programs, targets, and declarations mentioned excite advocates of universal and adequate SP in the Philippines. The social discourse has somehow changed in the last four decades: from the old neoliberal thinking that the government should stay out of the social insurance system and let the market take care of citizens' needs, the government is now encouraged to play an active role in providing protection for all and more especially for the needy and marginalized.

How does the PDP 2017-2022 seek to achieve enhanced SP for all Filipinos and zero poverty by 2040?

The answer is actually simple: Grow the economy at a high level. Table 1 summarizes the government's growth targets, averaging at over 7 percent per year. In contrast, actual growth rates for the years 2014, 2015, and 2016 are 6.1, 6.1 and 6.9 percent, respectively.

TABLE 1 • Real GDP growth targets, 2017–2022

Year	Target rates (%) (real GDP growth rate)
2017	6.5 – 7.5
2018	7.0 – 8.0
2019	7.0 – 8.0
2020	7.0 – 8.0
2021	7.0 – 8.0
2022	7.0 – 8.0

Source: NEDA 2017
Note: The government recently decided to reduce the Philippines' GDP growth target in 2019 to 6.0 to 6.5 percent and 6.5 to 7.5 percent from 2020 to 2022.[7]

Accordingly, by sustaining high economic growth, unemployment will be reduced from 5.5 percent in 2016 to an estimated 3 to 5 percent in 2022, while underemployment in areas outside the National Capital Region (NCR) will be reduced to around 16 to 18 percent in 2022 (NEDA 2017). Furthermore, poverty incidence is aimed to be reduced from 21.6 percent in 2015 to 14 percent by 2022—which the plan equates to six million Filipinos lifted out of poverty (ibid.). Given these, zero poverty may become possible by 2040 if the national income per capita is tripled in the span of 25 years. Table 2 shows some of the details of the poverty reduction targets under the PDP 2017–2022.

TABLE 2 • PDP 2017–2022 poverty reduction targets

Indicator	Baseline (2015)	Target (by 2022)
Per capita income (USD PPP)	$3,550	$5,000
Poverty incidence (rural areas)	30%	20%
Poverty incidence (overall)	21.6%	14%
Subsistence incidence	8.1%	5%
Unemployment rate	5.5%	3–5%
Underemployment rate (areas outside NCR)	NA	16–18%

Source: NEDA 2017

[7] Bernadette D. Nicolas, "DBCC scales down GDP growth target to 6-6.5%," Business Mirror, December 12, 2019, https://businessmirror.com.ph/2019/12/12/dbcc-scales-down-gdp-growth-target-to-6-6-5/.

How does the government plan to grow the economy at a high level?

This is where macroeconomic policy and development strategy come in. The Duterte administration has laid out a "0-10 point" socio-economic agenda, consisting of the following goals (those related to SP are in bold):

(0) Peace and order.

(1) **Continue and maintain current macroeconomic policies, including fiscal, monetary, and trade policies.**

(2) Institute progressive tax reform and more effective tax collection, indexing taxes to inflation.

(3) Increase competitiveness and the ease of doing business.

(4) **Accelerate annual infrastructure spending to account for 5% of GDP, with public-private partnerships playing a key role.**

(5) Promote rural and value chain development toward increasing agricultural and rural enterprise productivity and rural tourism.

(6) **Ensure security of land tenure to encourage investments, and address bottlenecks in land management and titling agencies.**

(7) Invest in human capital development, including health and education systems, and match skills and training to meet the demand of businesses and the private sector.

(8) Promote science, technology, and the creative arts to enhance innovation and creative capacity towards self-sustaining, inclusive development.

(9) **Improve social protection programs, including the government's conditional cash transfer program, to protect the poor against instability and economic shocks.**

(10) Strengthen implementation of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law to enable especially poor couples to make informed choices on financial and family planning (NEDA, n.d.).

These goals are a virtual continuation of the development thrusts of the PDP 2011–2016 of the Aquino administration. In fact, the first goal aims to "continue and maintain" existing macroeconomic policies. Like the present economic plan, the previous economic plan covers many socio-economic issues that the government tried to address in various ways. But the three major themes that were emphasized in the PDPs of the previous Aquino and Arroyo administrations are macroeconomic stability, public-private partnerships (PPPs) in infrastructure development, and CCT to improve the lot of the excluded poor.

Under the Duterte administration, these themes are not only reiterated, but also given extra importance. On macroeconomic policies, development planning remains focused on broad fiscal (i.e., revenues and expenditures), monetary, and agro-industrial policies to promote growth, control inflation, stabilize the economy, and create jobs. Similarly, this planning remains classic neoliberal in framework or orientation. With this kind of framework, the economy is pushed to keep on being open, deregulated, liberalized, and globalized through trade and investment liberalization. This paradigm also requires the deregulation of all sectors of the economy (i.e., industry, agriculture and services) and privatization, or reduction of the role of the public sector in the economy. Given this framework in planning, it is not surprising that the priority legislative agenda proposed by the NEDA include the following:

- The relaxation or amendment of the remaining Constitutional restrictions on foreign ownership in the conduct of business in the Philippines (mainly in certain services, for by and large, the economy has been liberalized since the 1990s);

- The passage of a law for ease of doing business in the Philippines;
- The amendment of the Public Service Act, specifically the definition of "public utility" in order to pave the way for further liberalization and privatization (including the entry of foreign investors) on public utility businesses;
- The amendment of the Retail Trade Act, in order to further lower the minimum capitalization required of foreign investors (which literally allows more foreigners to set up mom-and-pop stores in the country);
- The repeal of the Flag Law (Commonwealth Act 138), which means removing any preference for domestic suppliers and producers in the bidding of supplies or products for the government; and
- The adoption of an "open access policy" in the telecommunications sector, allowing the entry of big foreign telecommunication companies.

Similar and dissimilar approaches in growing the economy

Clearly, the Duterte administration's economic blueprint is not a break from the past. Its macroeconomic policy is essentially a continuation and deepening of the neoliberal economic framework instituted in the 1980s and 1990s, when the IMF and the World Bank lent the Philippines a series of structural adjustment loans to promote the triad neoliberal programs of liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. These programs were labeled then as structural adjustment programs (SAPs)—programs aimed at promoting the structural transformation of the economy. It assumes that such programs would lead to the formation of an open economy with a strong industrial and agricultural base, thereby producing for the global market and wiping out unemployment at home. The implementation of these SAPs were continuous since the 1980s, hence, several economic technocrats and managers are often quoted to "stay the course" in terms of planning for the development of the country.

Are there differences in the formulation of the country's macroeconomic framework from one PDP/MTPDP to the other? The answer is yes, but these differences are mainly in terms of the degree of intensification of the implementation of SAPs. Thus, in the case of the liberalization of the Philippine trade regime, the removal of trade restrictions was made in the 1980s, while the accelerated lowering of tariffs for various industrial products and the tariffication of the whole agricultural sector were pushed in the 1990s (after the Philippines became a member of the World Trade Organization in 1995), and since the turn of the millennium, the deepening of trade liberalization programs has been continued up to the present.[8]

In the case of privatization,[9] the original government program was focused on privatizing select government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs) and hundreds of heavily-indebted corporations foreclosed by government financial institutions (GFIs) during the debt crisis of the 1980s. This was followed by the privatization of government assets and properties such as military camps under the Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA). In the 1990s, government technocrats pursued a program called Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT)—practiced in varying schemes—to get the private sector involved in building much-needed infrastructure projects (e.g., expressways and airports) or in delivering

[8] See an outline of the trade liberalization program in Fair Trade Alliance's *Nationalist Development Agenda*.

[9] See Rene Ofreneo's *Panalo ba ang Pilipino? Three Decades of Privatization* (Quezon City: Focus on the Global South, 2011).

certain services such as electricity and water. Today, privatization has become the government's preferred modality in developing the country's infrastructure and in delivering basic public services. The BOT has been re-labeled as public-private partnerships, which is a favorite global term used by neoliberal economists, especially by privatization ideologues from the United Kingdom who ushered—together with the United States—the so-called privatization mania of the 1980s, more popularly hailed as the "Reaganite-Thatcher Revolution."

During the Aquino administration, PPP was promoted as the chief motor of growth. The Duterte administration, on the other hand, raised PPP to a higher level as it announced a "golden age" of infrastructure development largely based on the PPP modality. Through the numerous infrastructure development projects laid out by the current administration, the government and developers from the private sector hope to join forces in accelerating the country's growth. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) already announced that the Philippines—for the first time in several decades—has surpassed the five percent of GDP threshold in budgetary spending on infrastructure. This spending is projected to rise to seven to eight percent in the coming years, all in an attempt to boost and sustain growth and create more jobs.[10] Proposed infrastructure development projects do not only cover the usual sectors of transport and utilities, but also other sectors such as housing, health, education, and other social services.

The second big difference is that the Duterte administration is marketing the PPP not only to big conglomerates at home and the country's traditional partners such as the United States and Japan, but now also to non-traditional ones, mainly investors from the People's Republic of China. President Duterte himself has attended several China-related infrastructure conferences that espouse China's grand plan for Asia and the rest of world, popularly known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to build a "new Silk Road" and is heavily financed by the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), the new rival of the Japanese-led Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The Duterte administration also came up with a "hybrid PPP" program (DOF 2018). The idea is to speed up infrastructure development by encouraging givers of official development assistance (ODA), such as the AIIB and ADB, to focus assistance on priority infrastructure projects. The government itself allocates funds for certain targeted projects. Under this "hybrid" scheme, the private developers still do the construction, operation, and maintenance of selected infrastructure projects. It is obvious that the private contractors chosen under the hybrid scheme are usually those supported by the ODA donors and government technocrats.

On reinvigorating the industry and agriculture sectors

Like its predecessors, the Duterte administration has committed to the revival of the country's industrial and agricultural sectors, which has, ironically, stagnated and declined during the height of SAP implementation from the 1980s to the 2000s. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has laid out the Manufacturing Resurgence Program (MRP), while the Department of Agriculture (DA) faces multiple challenges because the sector, while employing one-third of the country's labor force, accounts only for less than ten percent of the GDP. This is in part due to the country's dependence on OFW remittances since the 1990s, which significantly transformed the economy into a consumption-led one by the turn of the millennium. Families of OFWs are able to spend on various consumption goods that are mainly imported and distributed by Filipino-Chinese business families (such as the Sys and the Gokongweis) in their ever-expanding chains of malls nationwide. The services sector, which is now the

[10] See Chapter 19 of the Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022.

biggest industry in terms of employment, was reinforced in recent years through the emergence of the business process outsourcing (BPO) sector hallmarked by the call center industry, which, like migration, is considered as a "gift" of globalization.

Now how does the government plan to grow industry and agriculture? Again, it is through the overall macroeconomic framework of trade and investment liberalization and deregulation, supplemented by government incentives which were previously frowned upon by doctrinaire neoliberal economists. Thus, in the case of industry revival, the PDP 2017–2022 is critical of the remaining constitutional restrictions against foreign participation in the economy and of other economic protectionist policies that hinder the full liberalization, deregulation, and globalization of key sectors of the economy. One major thrust of the plan is the promotion of the greater participation of the Philippines in global value chains (GVCs) of multinational companies. Big domestic corporations and foreign entities are likewise encouraged to participate in the "Build Build Build" program, the current administration's banner PPP program for infrastructure development.

In the case of agriculture, the PDP 2017–2022 has a realistic listing of numerous problems hounding the sector, such as the unfinished agrarian reform program, the ageing farming population, low agricultural productivity, and crumbling rural infrastructures. However, the plan's chapter on agriculture (Chapter 8) has some contradictory features. In the plan, there exists a radical proposal for the free distribution of land to the landless under a legislative agenda of "genuine and comprehensive agrarian reform program" (NEDA 2017, chap. 8: 13), probably due to the appointment of Rafael Mariano, a National Democratic (ND) leader, as agrarian reform secretary. However, the appointment of Mariano, along with fellow ND nominee former DSWD secretary Judy Taguiwalo, was rejected, thus they were not able to retain their Cabinet positions. The chapter also contains a proposal to lift quantitative restrictions in rice trade in order to make the rice sector competitive, in line with neoliberal thinking that economic openness leads to competitiveness and productivity. Yet in the debate on whether the National Food Authority (NFA) must be abolished or not, President Duterte sided with the DA proposal to bring the agency back to the department, and at the same time, strengthen the NFA's capacity to regulate imports and protect rice trade.

Continuing conditional cash transfers

The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program was adopted by the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo based on the encouragement and financial support of the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. The idea of the CCT was seductively simple: let the school-age children of poor unemployed parents go to school and let their mothers undergo regular medical check-up. In short, the World Bank's formula for poverty reduction consists of three conditions: higher level of enrolment among poor children, better maternal health care for poor mothers, and disposable income of around Php 1,200 a month for a poor family (Php 300 for each child—but only for a maximum of three and Php 500 for the mother).

The CCT program was not only accepted by the Aquino administration; it was transformed into a flagship or lead program on poverty reduction. The Duterte administration further expanded by increasing appropriations for CCT and pushing a legislation "institutionalizing" the program, Republic Act No. 11310 (enacted on April 17, 2019). There are now over four million families enrolled in the CCT program.

Is the CCT program the "magic bullet" on poverty reduction?

According to the World Bank, the CCT scheme is responsible for the reported reduction of the number of poor among the heavily-indebted countries in Latin America. There is a huge amount of literature assessing the social and economic impact of CCT since its propagation in the 1990s by the World Bank.

However, whether the CCT has succeeded in reducing poverty in countries that have adopted it is a subject of continuing debates among political economists.

What is not contested is that the CCT is helpful in alleviating, not reducing, poverty. In an evaluation of Latin America's experience with CCT, Cindy Calvo (2011, 70) concluded that CCT is "only a small part of necessary changes to improve social protection" for the poor. Her point: a comprehensive social and economic reform program is needed to address the structural or root causes of poverty.

In the Philippines, CSOs who analyze poverty from a structural perspective are similarly critical of the program. In 2010, Social Watch Philippines warned that the government should not equate CCT propagation to direct poverty reduction. It pointed out that the following concerns are overlooked by the proponents of CCT: (1) the 4Ps do not address all the dimensions of poverty and vulnerability, particularly the situation of other vulnerable poor (e.g., elderly, disabled, etc.); (2) the focus on cash distribution is at the expense of exerting more energy on job creation; and (3) the CCT program cannot work in areas where health, education, and transport facilities are not available.

There are other criticisms against the CCT program and the manner it is implemented by the government, both at the national and local levels. First, the reported four million or so families enrolled in the program means so many among the poor are excluded. There are around 23 million Filipino families and studies abound that at least half of the population can be categorized as poor. The exclusion problem is further compounded by the problem of *listahan* or listing, and how keepers (e.g., barangay captain, mayor, etc.) of the *listahan* are vulnerable to corruption.

Here comes the TRAIN

In summary, the PDP 2017–2022's macroeconomic framework is largely neoliberal and a mere continuation of the SAPs implemented since the 1980s. The plan continues to espouse the three-pronged drive of trade and investment liberalization, deregulation of key economic sectors, and privatization of public corporations, assets, and services. The growth of the economy, backed by infrastructure development under the PPP-led "Build Build Build" program, is touted to benefit the marginalized sectors of society. While these infrastructure projects are underway, those in the margins are assisted through the enhanced and expanded CCT program, which has now become the country's flagship program on poverty alleviation.

Now, how does the government plan to make its programs and projects work? Chapter 15 of the PDP 2017–2022 spells out the overall strategy on how to sustain its growth programs, mainly through (1) fiscal reforms, (2) monetary stability, and (3) trade openness.

Fiscal reform has already gained the attention of the nation since late 2017 when the Congress was asked to pass the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law. The justification for the law is rather straightforward: to make taxation "simpler, fairer, and more efficient" (DOF, n.d.). But the truth is that the administration's "Build Build Build" program requires huge budgetary allocations even if the government seeks to mobilize private sector investments on PPP projects. According to the DBM, the government is going to spend USD 160 to USD 180 billion in six years (Diokno 2017). The ensuing rise in fiscal deficit shall be covered by the additional revenues generated by TRAIN and increased borrowings, to be sourced mainly from the domestic banking sector (ibid.).

On monetary stability, the plan proposes to maintain the existing policies of market-determined exchange rate for the peso, prudential rules in banking, and flexibility in determining inflation targets.

On external trade, the policies put forward are those favored by neoliberal economists: increased participation in various regional and bilateral free-trade agreements (mostly those involving the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)), compliance with the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s customs facilitation measures to ensure the freer flow of goods, and the promotion of competitiveness-enhancing measures in support of the country's export drive. As pointed out earlier, the plan calls for greater and higher value-added Philippine participation in the GVCs of multinationals. The plan also seeks the further liberalization of the economy, including constitutional amendments and the shortening of the Foreign Investment Negative List, to encourage more foreigners to invest in the Philippine economy.

The PDP 2017–2022's macroeconomic development and poverty reduction measures

Now that almost four years of the Duterte administration have passed, there are doubts among many in civil society that the promises of inclusive growth, sustained development, full employment, and poverty reduction outlined in *AmBisyon Natin 2040* and the PDP 2017–2022 shall be fulfilled. There are clear indications that certain assumptions of the macroeconomic growth program are weak, and certain realities in the economy are not fully apprehended by the authors of the plan. There are at least two major realities that must be considered.

First reality: Growth does not automatically lead to inclusive growth sans social reforms and people's participation

Both *AmBisyon Natin 2040* and the PDP 2017–2022 stresses the importance of maintaining the high growth trajectory for the Philippines. The reason is simple: the more growth there is, the more jobs are created. Ideally, in the long run, unemployment and poverty will disappear. Such logic is a reiteration of "trickle-down" economics, which many development economists have shown to be narrow and not enough to produce welfare for everyone. The GDP pie may be growing, but those consuming the pie may consist of only a tiny percentage of the population. If growth involves the employment of half of the population and if gains from growth are appropriated by only ten percent of the population, how is it inclusive?

Figure 1 (on next page) is a reproduction of the presentation made by DA Secretary Manuel Piñol to the Senate Committee on Finance in September 2017. The statistics leave out the fact that growth does not automatically become inclusive. In the high-growth years of 2011 to 2015, with the GDP averaging almost six percent, the poverty reduction rate was a miserly 2.35 percent. Of course, there is logic in the presentation made by Piñol: he wanted the Senate to appropriate more funds for DA programs—all in the name of poverty reduction.

The point is that growth can only be inclusive if there is an equitable sharing of opportunities and wealth creation. This is precisely one of the criticisms against the PPP-anchored "Build Build Build" program. The participants of the program only involve a group of big Philippine conglomerates and their foreign partners. So far, around 61 big-ticket PPP projects have been announced (BusinessWorld 2017). A quick look at the list shows that most of these PPPs are located in the developed regions and areas: Metro Manila, Regions III and IV, Region VII, Region XI, and highly urbanized cities. The underdeveloped regions and localities are underrepresented in the PPP list. Also, there is hardly any PPP for the urban and rural poor communities, such as projects for their renewal and transformation into modern and progressive ones.

The determination of what to build and what the priorities are under the "Build Build Build" program is apparently lodged in the hands of only a few, with minimal participation from the people, including those to be affected by the infrastructure.

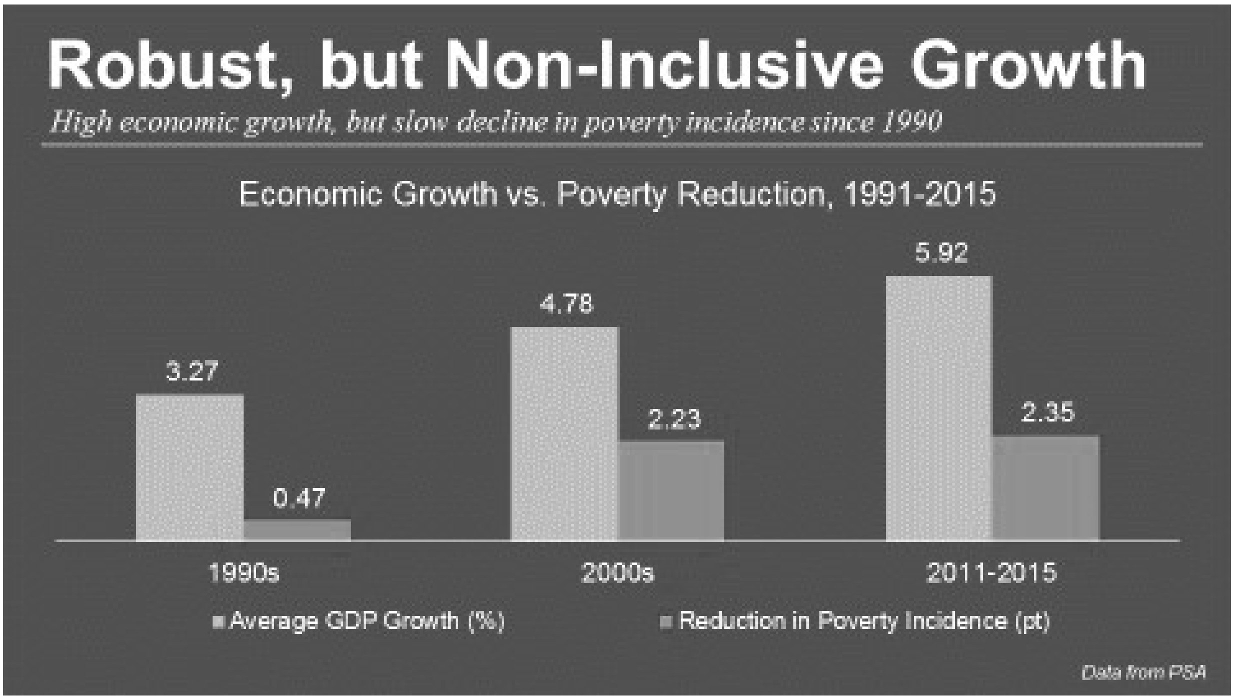

FIGURE 1 • Economic growth versus poverty reduction
Source: Former DA Secretary Manuel Emmanuel Piñol's presentation to the Senate Committee on Finance, September 4, 2017

A case in point is the rehabilitation of the war-devastated Marawi City. The public bidding process for the project was set aside in favor of direct selection of the builders, which consists of a consortium of six Chinese and four Filipino firms, subject to the application of the so-called "Swiss challenge" in projects exempted from public bidding.[11] However, according to Muslim scholar Professor Rufa Guiam (2018), the voice of the people of Marawi was drowned out, not only in the awarding of the project but also, and more importantly, in its design and implementation plan.

In fact, critical in the promotion of inclusive growth is the active involvement and participation of affected stakeholders in growth programs. Such involvement and participation can be secured through consultation and dialogue, which were absent in the above case of the rebuilding Marawi project, and in the implementation of people empowerment programs such as agrarian reform, urban reform, and human resource development among others. Such empowerment programs are part of the SP program discussed earlier. And yet, the Duterte administration has been giving mixed signals on these reforms, as seen in the following examples:

- The appointment, and later non-confirmation, of reform-minded individuals in the Cabinet (DENR's Gina Lopez, DAR's Rafael Mariano and DSWD's Judy Taguiwalo);
- The retention of the DAR bureaucracy (slated for merger under the plan of the previous administration) and at the same time, virtual non-extension of the land acquisition and distribution component of the comprehensive agrarian reform program; and

[11] The revised Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act No. 6957, as amended by R.A. No. 7718 (or more popularly known as the "Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Law") defines "Swiss challenge" as "the comparative bidding process…in the case of unsolicited proposals." See "The Philippine Amended BOT Law (R.A. 7718) and its Revised Implementing Rules & Regulations (IRR)," https://ppp.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/BOT-IRR-2012_FINAL.pdf.

- The strengthened efforts to enforce industry compliance with labor laws but, at the same time, non-fulfilment of Duterte's promise to issue an Executive Order ending the "endo" system, etc.

The tax reform component was advertised as a pro-poor program because low-income workers were exempted from paying any taxes. However, the shift to increased taxation of consumption goods means all consumers, rich and poor alike, will experience price increase and reduced purchasing power. But the impact would naturally fall hardest on majority of the Philippine population, who have limited incomes, in particular, anybody earning less than Php 20,000 a month.

Not surprisingly, the high growth rates of 2016 and 2017 do not translate to substantial decline in poverty. The Social Weather Stations (2018) report on self-rated poverty shows that the numbers even increased from 44 percent in 2016 to 46 percent in 2017.[16] The number of poor families at the end of 2017 is estimated to be 10 million, or almost half the national population.

Second reality: Root causes of poverty and underdevelopment still unaddressed

After projecting a pattern of high growth from 2017 onwards through the "Build Build Build" and the general maintenance of the neoliberal macroeconomic development program, NEDA concluded that the Philippines is on course to its zero poverty goal by 2040. NEDA should be told that trickle-down economics, even if it registers high growth for the country, does not automatically lead to inclusive development where all citizens benefit.

Also, NEDA should be asked why the growth model of the past based on neoliberal SAP economics, which is maintained up to the present, has failed to deliver the welfare and poverty reduction promises made to the Filipino people. Another government agency, the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), rightly reminded everyone that sustainable development entails acknowledgement of the root causes of Philippine poverty and underdevelopment, and the subsequent need to adopt policies to correct these maladies. In its Reforming Philippine Anti-Poverty Policy (Africa et al. 2017), the NAPC identified four root causes of poverty: (1) underdevelopment of industry and agriculture, (2) unequal distribution of income, assets and opportunities, (3) inadequate social services, and (4) limited social protection.

On the backwardness of the industrial and agricultural sectors, the NAPC study pointed out that the "overly market-oriented Philippine economic policy has not developed these vital sectors, and instead made the economy prematurely service-oriented with an overreliance on overseas remittances and foreign investment" (ibid., 23). This is a reiteration of what DIGNIDAD and other CSOs have been saying, that the transformation into a vibrant economy with plenty of jobs, and a strong industrial and agricultural sector, as promised by neoliberal economists, has not been achieved. This is despite four decades of faithful implementation by NEDA of the IMF-World Bank's SAPs under the different PDPs/MTPDPs. Now the NEDA wants to maintain the course for a failed neoliberal development compass!

Of course, the economy is growing today, at a high level. But this is not due to the successes of the neoliberal development program. This is due, first and foremost, to the phenomenal growth of overseas migration. Unable to find decent jobs at home, over 10 million Filipinos went overseas to look for greener pastures. Today, migrant workers remit close to USD 30 billion a year (KNOMAD 2016), enabling big retailers like Henry Sy and John Gokongwei to expand their chains of malls nationwide. The migration largesse has been supplemented in recent years by a surprise gift of globalization, the call center/BPO sector, which now employs over a million Filipinos and provides the country with around USD 25 billion reported earnings (DOST-ICTO and BPAP 2012).

But both phenomena were not part of the original neoliberal development program that was focused on the transformation of industry and agriculture. Both overseas migration and the call center/BPO sector are facing an uncertain future. The former because of the rising xenophobia against migrant workers in most of the labor-receiving countries and the continuing unpredictability of the job situation in the Middle East due to the "localization" programs of some countries, the deadly ISIS terrorism, and the Shia-Sunni conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The latter because the call center/BPO boom has stopped, as admitted by NEDA Director General Ernesto Pernia, due to advances in robotics and artificial intelligence reducing the incentive for American and European companies to outsource repetitive service tasks to overseas call center agents.

In the meantime, the country's trade deficits keep growing (see Table 3) because the DTI's manufacturing resurgence program still has to take off, while the DA's agricultural modernization has remained a paper program. The country's top exports are assembled electronic products, while the top imports are also electronic products, mainly for assembly. This means the country has not graduated into higher value-processing and has not developed the capacity to manufacture, on its own, industrial products for sale at home and overseas.

TABLE 3 • Philippine trade performance (in million USD)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Exports	52,100	56,698	62,102	58,827	57,406	68,713
Imports	62,129	62,411	65,398	71,607	84,108	96,093
Balance of trade in goods	–10,029	–5,713	–3,297	–12,240	–26,702	–27,380

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority 2016a

As a result of the widening trade deficits and the inflationary impact of TRAIN, the peso has been weakening since 2017. If the trade deficits continue to widen and the peso continues to erode, such developments can pose political and economic risks to the Duterte administration, similar to what happened in the last few years of the Marcos administration and the final year of the Estrada administration.

But one big issue on sustainability pertains to the "Build Build Build" program, which entails heavy borrowing from foreign and local banks. It is estimated that the USD 167 billion amount programmed for the "Build Build Build" would increase the existing national debt of USD 123 billion to USD 290 billion, which, at 10 percent interest rate, could balloon to USD 452 billion by the end of the six-year period (Corr 2017). This will make the projected "Philippines' debt/GDP ratio to 197 percent, making it the second worst in the world." (ibid.) The DBM quickly rejected the idea that the Philippines would have a debt problem, explaining that most borrowings would be made with local banks, and there would be a calibration of growth and debt payment capacity.

Looking back to the 1970s, the Marcos administration also engaged in heavy infrastructure development, funded by the IMF and the World Bank, which declared the Philippines as "an area of concentration." The economic technocrats then said that the country has no sectors to grow to be able to pay for its debt. The economy grew in the 1970s because of the infrastructure boom, but began faltering in the early 1980s, when the country could not service its huge debt. This led to the ignominious downfall of the Marcos regime.

The need for integrated socio-economic reforms and SP-focused macroeconomic framework

In light of the previous sections, it is made clear that taking on a macroeconomic policy plays multiple roles: growth promotion, inflation control, foreign exchange stabilization, trade balancing, industry revival, agricultural renewal and, yes, poverty reduction, economic inclusion, and sustainable development. This was, to a certain extent, recognized by the authors of the PDP 2017–2022, with their formulation of the interrelated themes of *"malasakit," "pagbabago,"* and *"patuloy na pag-unlad,"* supported by a call for "strategic trade and fiscal policy, maintain macroeconomic stability, promote competition."

The aspirational goals of PDP 2017–2022 and *AmBisyon Natin 2040* are not debatable. They are also pushing for universal SP and zero poverty.

The problem is the failure of the government's economic planners to recognize weaknesses in the existing development strategy that is "overly focused" on market liberalization, in the words of NAPC. This development strategy is essentially based on the neoliberal strategy of growing the economy through a three-pronged program of trade investment liberalization, economic deregulation, and privatization, all of which have been pushed by the government in the last four decades under various administrations. The difference is that privatization is being catapulted at a higher level through the PPP-led "Build Build Build" program.

The country's own experience with this development strategy shows it can and does lead to unequal, and even unsustained growth.

A gap analysis of the PDP 2017–2022 based on selected social indicators

Rights-based protection versus vulnerability reduction

While the PDP 2017–2022 states that it aims for "universal and transformative social protection" for all Filipinos, its difference with DIGNIDAD's framework is that it defines and fleshes out what it means by "social." It primarily centers on the government's plans to reduce the risks faced by particular vulnerable segments of society, including the poor and transient poor, children, women, PWDs, IPs, OFWs and their families, older persons, and workers in the informal sector. Individual economic, environmental and natural, and political risks are identified, then "packages" are designed to address these risks experienced by the identified vulnerable sectors.

This supposedly leads to the building of socioeconomic resilience in society, which, in turn, translates to inequality-reducing transformation (*pagbabago*). Hence, the "transformative" aspect of social protection views the poor and vulnerable, as objects of development, as being transformed into resilient individuals, families, and communities.

In contrast, DIGNIDAD and other CSOs assert that it is important for social protection policies, programs, projects, and activities to be pursued by the people themselves and to engage the full participation and active involvement of the people and communities, in order to become the agents of the transformation for themselves. Moreover, being "universal" means that it should be a right that is extended to everyone and should consist of all the elements and measures that guarantee each person a life of dignity from infancy to old age.

The voluminous tome that embodies the Duterte administration's blueprint for development promises to lift a million people out of poverty annually for six (6) years, thus reducing the poverty incidence rate from 21.6 percent just before President Duterte took over the helm of government to 14 percent by the time he steps down in 2022 (NEDA 2017). The government's idea of social protection provision encompasses programs, policies, and activities designed to eradicate poverty and vulnerability in times of economic shocks, dislocation, disasters, ageing, sickness, and disability. However, DIGNIDAD maintains that social protection should go beyond this framework.

The proposed framework in bringing to light both the positive aspects and the gaps in social protection in the PDP 2017–2022 will consider the following:

- Promotion of a transformative development paradigm;
- Progressive realization of universal social protection/coverage;
- Adequacy and predictability of benefits (including budgets);
- Non-discrimination and gender equality;
- Social inclusion and responsiveness to special needs;
- Solidarity economy/financing against privatization;
- Social dialogue on design and implementation; and
- Adequacy of legislation and policy coherence.

Are the social protection commitments found in the pages of the PDP 2017–2022 rights-based, inclusive, and promotive of social justice and sustainable development? Do these strategies take on a life-cycle approach that goes beyond providing short-term safety nets to only a portion of the poor, disadvantaged, and vulnerable? Are these commitments backed by adequate resources?

Universal and guaranteed healthcare for all

What does the PDP 2017–2022 say about providing healthcare? The main outcomes sought by the plan with regard to healthcare for all include the following:

- Improved nutrition and health for all (Chapter 10)
- Ensured access to functional service delivery networks (Chapters 5 and 10)
- Sustained health financing (Chapter 10)
- Reduced fertility rates (Chapter 13)
- Mitigated risks faced by vulnerable groups (Chapter 11)

The main scheme of the government in providing healthcare for all Filipinos is through the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation, which is supposed to provide compulsory health insurance that covers both inpatient (for confinement of more than 24 hours) and outpatient care in accredited hospitals, clinics, and rural health units. This also covers room use, medicines, and fees for treatments, including day surgeries, dialysis, and cancer treatments, among others. Maternal care packages, ranging from Php 6,500 in hospitals and Php 8,000 in other health institutions, may also be availed, along with newborn care packages of up to Php 1,750 (PhilHealth 2015). There is also fixed coverage for tuberculosis amounting to Php 4,000 and for other primary care needs. However, the government admits that 15 percent of children still remain uncovered, even if PhilHealth only requires parents to sign a claim form as a member to avail PhilHealth benefits for their children.

Of importance to poor and vulnerable families is the primary healthcare benefit package for indigents and sponsored members and their families, which includes an annual examination for preventive care and diagnosis. This package will help poor families because once a family member falls ill, their finances are upended, which could bring down those just above the poverty line down below the threshold. However, the outpatient and the expanded primary care benefit package under the Philhealth program *TSeKaP* (Tamang Serbisyo para sa Kalusugan ng Pamilya) is still currently not available for all members. For several decades now, the Philippine healthcare system has been geared more toward curative care and providing access to tertiary health services, rather than putting in place holistic, universal, fully-resourced, and adequately staffed primary health care services at the community level.

Moreover, health insurance coverage for workers in the informal sector is low, because they are unable to regularly comply with their premium payments because of the seasonal nature of their work. This is the problem in anchoring the universal provision of healthcare on a scheme that is not free for all and in relying heavily on targeting systems. One of the implementation issues pointed out in the Assessment Matrix of the Philippine Social Protection Operational Framework Strategy is that for PhilHealth's sponsored coverage programs, there is no standard targeting mechanism employed across local government units and this results to patronage and corruption in the system. With this system, some non-poor households get covered while some of the poor are excluded. Following the DIGNIDAD framework of analysis, the universality of the social protection and its coverage is found to be lacking.

Moreover, in terms of social inclusion and responsiveness to special needs, the care package for children with disabilities is still not defined in terms of the type of disability and age group, despite the release of PhilHealth Circular 2016-032 ("Guiding Principles for the Z Benefits for Children with Disabilities") (PhilHealth 2016) that covers heavy impairment, visual impairment, mobility impairment, and developmental impairment. It seems that the problem lies in the varying interpretations of policies and circulars by PhilHealth regional offices and health facilities.

Also, some vital healthcare services are not part of the benefit package, such as psychotherapy, drug rehabilitation treatment, and epilepsy care. These health issues are by no means confined solely to the well-off. For instance, we have seen that many of the drug-related extrajudicial killing (EJK) cases involve mainly the poor.

Purportedly, the development objective in the PDP 2017–2022 to improve nutrition and health is to achieve all the impact indicators in Table 4 below. These include, among others, reduce fertility rate, increase modern contraceptive prevalence rate, reduce under-five mortality, maternal mortality, prevalence of underweight children, and tuberculosis prevalence; increase percent of births attended by health attendants and delivered in health facilities, increase immunized children, etc. But in the Public Investment Plan, only Php 7.9 billion is allocated for all of these targets within the six-year plan period, while Php 13.78 billion is programmed for lifestyle-related diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart diseases. It is being pointed out that it is not true those diseases are confined to the well-off, similar to drug-related and mental health issues. But the point is not that there is too much allocated for it. The point is that there is too little for all the rest put together.

TABLE 4 • Core indicators for targets to improve nutrition and health

Indicator	Baseline (2015)	End of plan target
Life expectancy at birth	72.77 (2015–2020)	75 (2020–2025)
Total fertility rate	3.1	2.1
Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births	114	90
Neonatal mortality rate per 1,000 live births	13 (2013)	10
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births	23 (2013)	15
Under-5 mortality rate per 1,000 live births	27 (2013)	22
Premature mortality attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases	—	No target
Proportion of households with per capita intake below 100% dietary energy requirement	68.3	61.1
Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 (%)	33.4	21.4

TABLE 4 • Core indicators for targets to improve nutrition and health *(continued)*

Indicator	Baseline (2015)	End of plan target
Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 population	322	225
Malaria prevalence per 100,000 population	7.74	< 1
Number of new HIV infections (newly diagnosed cases/year)	7,831	Reverse trend
Modern contraceptive prevalence rate (%)	37.6 (2013)	65

Source: NEDA 2017

Healthcare is considered a big business under the current neoliberal paradigm. There is a wide policy gap between reaching outcomes of improved nutrition and health for all and acquiring unbridled profit at the expense of the health of the people. To date, there are no regulations in place to control the fees charged by healthcare providers. There is also a constant push to privatize government hospital services by scrimping on their national budget allocations, which ironically leaves them open to critiques of inability to provide efficient and quality services, which, in turn, gives justification to cutting their budgets. Public healthcare institutions are trapped in an inescapable logic of deficiency and inefficiency geared toward private takeover.

The current big controversy over the tragic consequences of the obviously greedy-for-profit and unethical school-based mass immunization of children using an insufficiently tested dengue vaccine is a similarly stark depiction of the kind of healthcare system that is not pro-people, not empowering, and not transformative.

Free and quality education up to the tertiary level

The PDP 2017–2022 states that the government recognizes human development not just as a means to an end (i.e. human capital as a factor of production), but also as an end in itself. Human development being "an end in itself" should denote the development of the full potential of individuals towards their ability to become competitive.

Thus for civil society formations—and in contrast to what the PDP 2017–2022 espouses—the concept of people's capacity development that is more transformative is one in which the individual is not removed and alienated from the community and its needs, and therefore valuing the principles of cooperation rather than competition and where their capacity to claim other rights is enabled.

To give credit to the PDP 2017–2022, it seeks to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all. This means that the plan also takes into consideration the fourth SDG that seeks quality education for all. This particular SDG does not only talk about basic education or education in the school setting (elementary and high school), but also equitable opportunities for lifelong learning. The assertion is that basic education is not enough for decent work and life in the real world.

What DIGNIDAD calls for is free and quality education up to the tertiary level for all. Why should the aspirations of our youth be limited to basic education, while their counterparts in developed countries are assured of lifelong learning opportunities? It is safe to argue that many Filipino parents aspire for their children to have a college education and a better chance of being lifted out of income poverty. Even the survey of almost 10,000 individuals whose responses were fed into *AmBisyon Natin 2040* reveals that when asked about what constitutes a simple and comfortable life, 73 percent of the respondents said that it is a life where all children are college-educated.

But looking at the target indicators laid out in the PDP 2017–2022, all but one pertain to elementary and high school education (see Table 5). The only target on tertiary education is increasing the percentage of students awarded with scholarship grants and other forms of financial assistance. It is also notable that from the baseline, only 5 percent of students enjoy such scholarships, while the target by 2022 is increasing this percentage to only 10 percent of all students. Likewise, it also very explicitly stated that the end goal is to achieve global competitiveness, rather than fulfilling the human capacity needs of the communities, the national industries, and the country's development in general.

TABLE 5 • Core indicators for targets to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all

Indicator	Baseline (2015)	End of plan target
Mean years of schooling	8.9 (2014)	11.3
Functional literacy rate	90.3 (2013)	—
Net enrolment rate (elementary)	91.05	95.00
Net enrolment rate (junior high school)	68.15	75.44
Completion rate (elementary)	83.43	90.00
Completion rate (junior high school)	73.97	78.48
Completion rate (senior high school)	—	No target
Proportion of students performing at moving towards mastery, closely approximating mastery, and mastered increased (elementary)	63.93	74.39
Proportion of students performing at moving towards mastery, closely approximating mastery, and mastered increased (junior high school)	14.37	20.00
Proportion of students performing at moving towards mastery, closely approximating mastery, and mastered increased (senior high school)	—	No target
Percentage of students awarded scholarships, grants, and other financial assistance (%)	5	10

Source: NEDA 2017

The strategies of the government in pursuing lifelong learning for all, as set down in the PDP 2017–2022 are:

- Achieve quality, accessible, relevant, and liberating basic education for all
- Improve the quality of higher and technical education and research for equity and global competitiveness

While it is noteworthy that higher and technical education and research is being pursued to address equity, it must be noted that, as previously mentioned, the purpose of pursuing these is to ensure global competitiveness.

Looking closely at the core indicators for education and lifelong learning in the plan, the initial baseline of a mean 8.9 years of schooling is targeted to be increased to an average of 11.3 years by 2022. The new K to 12 curriculum added two years in the basic education system through the senior high school program. Given this, we should have targeted full 12 years of schooling for all, whether through the formal system or the non-formal pathways such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS). Moreover, no targets were put in place for the completion rate for senior high school students, while only a minimal 5.5 percent increase was targeted for those completing junior high school, covering only three-fourths of all junior high school students. Granted that the baseline for quality learning outcomes in junior high school was very low—with only 14.37 percent of students learning at least two-thirds of what they were supposed to learn—the 2022 target of only 20 percent (or 1 in 5 students) can hardly ensure that those advancing to senior high school would be prepared to tackle the next stage of basic education. And because there are no quality targets for the senior high school program in the plan, what does this say about their preparedness for tertiary education, for higher and advanced technical education, or for the world of work and entrepreneurship?

Data in the Labor Force Surveys of the government in recent years show that as much as 39 percent of people already in the workforce have not completed basic education. For Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL), the most relevant pathway for them and for out-of-school children and youth (OSCY)—which number at least four million (PSA 2015b)—is the Alternative Learning System (ALS), and the current leadership of the Department of Education has been giving it much more attention than the previous administrations. But the ALS or non-formal education figures nowhere in the PDP 2017–2022.

The PDP 2017–2022 highlights the role of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in its human capital development framework. But the core indicators do not include targets for the certification of these graduates, which is an important proof that they have acquired the essential competency requirements for specific levels of occupations.

Living pension for older persons

The baseline figure assumed by the PDP 2017–2002 for the population of older persons in the Philippines 60 years and above is 7.6 million as of 2015 or 7.5 percent of the total population (NEDA 2017). Based on government estimates, about 1.3 million indigent senior citizens are enrolled in the Social Pension Program, which is equivalent to 95.6 percent of the target population (ibid.). The PDP targets 100 coverage of the social pension for these senior citizens by 2022.

Republic Act No. 10645 provides mandatory health insurance coverage to all older persons through PhilHealth. Aside from this, the Social Pension Program for indigent senior citizens, which was in place since 2011, grants each elderly individual a monthly pension of Php500. The current PDP did not specifically mention any planned increase in this amount, noting that doing so would need to take into consideration the increasing population of older persons and that bigger budgets would be needed to cover the entire target group. By 2030, the estimate is that there will be 14.3 million older persons or 11 percent of the total population.

However, the PDP 2017–2022 mentions a plan to review the Senior Citizen Law to tackle adjustments in the social pension, which is inadequate to sustain life, given that older persons have a more fragile health status, no longer enjoy the same incomes they may have had earlier, or remain with no incomes as in the case of the indigent. A study by the Coalition of Services for the Elderly (COSE) and HelpAge International shows that 40 percent of expenditures by households receiving social pension goes to food, 25 percent on medical expenses, and 13 percent on household bills (e.g., water and electricity) (Knox-Vydmanov, Horn, and Sevilla 2016).

The PDP 2017–2022 also mentions a plan to redefine the inclusion criteria to improve coverage. COSE estimates that three million out of about eight million older persons are not covered by Social Security System (SSS), the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), or even the Social Pension for indigent senior citizens. Moreover, stakeholders have pointed out problems in program design and in implementation such as: (1) errors in the targeting mechanism; (2) political patronage in the inclusion-exclusion system; and (3) lack of uniform interpretation, especially at local levels, of what "indigent" means. The PDP 2017–2022 admits that such a restrictive definition in qualifying the indigent senior citizen hinders access to the program.

The only other proviso in the PDP 2017–2022, aside from that "there is no national government body dedicated to address the issues confronting the senior citizens" (NEDA 2017, 168), is the establishment of a Council for the Welfare of Older Persons to "coordinate the formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of policies, plans, and programs for senior citizens" (ibid., 175). It is also worth noting that the legislative agenda of the PDP 2017–2022 includes an Anti-Senior Citizen Abuse Act to protect senior citizens from all forms of abuse (ibid.).

Social security system for formal and informal workers

The SSS and GSIS are social security systems geared towards addressing the vulnerabilities and risks faced by the formal and informal labor force. According to the PDP 2017–2022, "GSIS pensioners receive at least Php5,000 per month, while SSS pensioners receive at least P2,200 per month" (NEDA 2017, 169).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines informal economy workers as those "independent, self-employed, small-scale producers and distributors of goods and services." These include vendors, jeepney and tricycle drivers, domestic helpers, and unpaid family workers, among others.

Data from the Labor Force Survey puts the number of informal sector workers at 15.6 million or 38 percent of the total working population of the country (Pasion 2017). As of November 2016, voluntary SSS members numbered 3.8 million, while self-employed members totaled 4.5 million or a total of only 8.3 million or 53 percent covered by social security among the 15.6 million workers in the informal sector. Policy makers refer to these unregistered workers of the informal economy as the "missing middle" which do not receive benefits, social security and social pension due to policy gaps. Considering that more than 90 percent of the economy is composed of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), then it may be that the numbers of informal workers are in reality much bigger than what the Labor Force Survey extrapolates.

Because of the precarity of their work, informal workers often find that they cannot afford the regular contributions towards their social security and do not bother to enroll in the program; and even if they did take the trouble of registering as voluntary or self-employed members of SSS, many fail to remit their payments regularly and continuously.

To manage risks faced by workers in the informal sector, the PDP 2017–2022 puts forward the following strategies:

(1) Enhance social protection for the informal sector: Benefits and SP services will expand to cover workers in the informal economy;

(2) Facilitate transition of workers from the informal to the formal economy: This will target the promotion and facilitation of access to SP programs such as employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, social security schemes, social services, and insurance systems;

(3) Strengthen mechanisms to ensure enrolment in social security schemes: The government will revisit and assess existing mechanisms to encourage SSS enrolment of people in the informal sector. (NEDA 2017, 175)

To this effect, the government plans to pursue legislative action to put up a subsidy on social insurance for the informal sector, to safeguard and encourage them by registering them in government programs.

However, upon closer examination of the targets and core indicators under this section, there are none set up for informal workers; the only targets mentioned are 100 percent coverage by 2022 for SSS and GSIS and 100 percent Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) membership by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) (NEDA 2017).

DIGNIDAD's concept of living pension

Under the current system, the social pension program may either be contributory, like the SSS and GSIS where members contribute to a fund and receive pension upon retirement, or non-contributory, wherein older persons are given cash transfers from budgets from the government's tax revenues. The inadequacies of the entire system manifest in the lack of coverage, even for those who need it most. Even the poor who do enjoy coverage find the amounts inadequate to maintain decent lives.

What DIGNIDAD proposes is a universal social pension system that covers everyone and adequately covers very basic day-to-day living requirements for the older persons. This universal social pension system should cover the elements listed below.

Social protection for the unemployed

To protect workers from high economic risks, the PDP 2017–2022 proposes putting in place programs that include an unemployment insurance mechanism. The plan says it hopes to address income insecurity through this measure "by [(1)] facilitating re-employment for involuntarily-unemployed individuals[, (2)] re-tooling as required in job transitions or entrepreneurial endeavors[,] and [(3)] cushioning individuals and their families from the impact of involuntary work dismissal" (NEDA 2017, 175).

Income and other support for children

The common categorization of children puts everyone who is below 18 years old as a child. It is less known, however, that under Republic Act No. 9523, a person over 18 years is also regarded a child if s/he "is unable to fully care for him/herself or protect himself/herself from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition" (Sec. 2). It is favorable that the PDP 2017–2002 also considers the latter definition of the child. Moreover, the PDP 2017–2022 recognizes the high vulnerability of children, citing previous years' statistics such as 35.2 percent of children being poor, 3.3 million children forced to work, of which 2.1 million were engaged in child labor, with a huge chunk (97 percent) working under hazardous labor conditions (NEDA 2017).

The main schemes identified by government to address the needs of children within the social protection framework matrix are:

(1) Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and Modified Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)

(2) Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP)

(3) Special Program for the Employment of Students (SPES)

The 4Ps scheme was started in 2008. Supposedly, the poorest households in the poorest municipalities were selected via a proxy-means test by the National Household Targeting System-Poverty Reduction (NHTS-PR) Program of the DSWD. The criteria for choosing the family beneficiaries includes the presence of either a pregnant member or a child (0 to 8 years old). The Modified CCT, on the other hand, targets homeless and street families, and indigenous people who are not part of the NHTS-PR.

The scheme provides a grant of Php 500 per month per household, prenatal and post-natal care during childbirth, on the condition that the pregnant women avail of prenatal and post-natal care and attend Family Development Sessions (FDS), and that the children aged 0 to 5 receive regular check-ups, vaccinations, and deworming pills.

The 4Ps also has the objective of investing in human capital, and includes an education grant of Php 300 per month per elementary school child and Php 500 per month per high school child. Each household may have up to three children, with the grant lasting for 10 months per academic year. The condition for receiving income support is that the children are enrolled in day care centers or schools and must show at least 85 percent attendance in classes.

The policy gaps identified include the following:

(1) The 4Ps and the CCT are not institutionalized in law, having been put in place though a DSWD Administrative Order, and financed through national budget allocations in the General Appropriations Act by Congress and Senate. Hence, there are concerns about their sustainability through changing political leaderships.

(2) Currently, only three children per family are eligible for the cash transfer, when statistics show that it is the poor households who have more number of children.

(3) The beneficiaries of the 4Ps are restricted to regular and nuclear families and excludes children who do not belong to families in its traditional sense (e.g., street children).

(4) On the design and benefits, it is observed that the grant rates were based on the 2008 incomes and prices, which was when the 4Ps was launched. The current grant rates are too low and only account for a smaller share of household income, lessening the incentives for families to comply with the conditions of the program. The benefits include medical check-ups for children aged 0 to 5, but do not address the prevalence of stunting and malnutrition through provision of micronutrient supplements.

(5) Finally, there is no incentive/condition for the beneficiary families to stop the children from engaging in child labor, despite the 4Ps also aiming to eliminate child labor.

The FDS could have been excellent venues for learning important areas of responsible parenting such as child rights and child labor, hygiene promotion, etc. There are gaps in the scope of the modules being used, including those needed on nutrition education.

Another implementation issue noted is the lack of accessibility of schools and/or health facilities in some areas, and therefore some households are unable to comply with the conditionalities of cash transfer. While there are agreements in terms of providing Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) to family beneficiaries, convergence with other government agencies (like the DepEd) remains problematic.

DepEd budgets for School-based Feeding Program (SFP) that targets only severely malnourished Kindergarten to Grade 6 children enrolled in day care centers, pre-school or elementary schools in selected geographic areas. DSWD, on the other hand, has Supplemental Feeding Programs that target all children 0 to 5 years old. Hot meals consisting of rice and viand are provided, sometimes with fruit if budgets allow.

The downside of the scheme is that it does not maintain the children's nutrition status, given the limited number of feeding days in a year (only five days a week or a total of 120 days a year). Also, for the SFP of DSWD, not all LGUs have day care centers, denying access to some children. Limited LGU budgets, especially in poorer municipalities, lead to wide variations in the implementation of the SFP.

In other cases, discontinuity happens because of failure in timely liquidation, accounting, and auditing requirements, and hence, release of further funds.

In the DIGNIDAD framework of assessment, both the 4Ps and the SFP schemes fail to pass in terms of progressive realization of universality of social protection/coverage and the SFP scheme fails additionally in terms of adequacy and predictability of benefits (including budgets).

From a "life of dignity" perspective, conditional cash transfers may be effective in the short term, but for longer-term sustainable development and empowerment of people in communities, its impact is debatable. Feedback on the 4Ps by beneficiaries themselves point to the preference for employment and means of earning over dole outs.

Republic Act Nos. 9547 and 7323 provide the legal framework for the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES). Implemented by the DOLE Bureau of Local Employment together with the Public Employment Service Offices (PESOs) of LGUs, the scheme targets poor but deserving high school, college, vocational students, and dropouts between 15 to 25 years old, whose family incomes are below the poverty threshold. In the scheme, students can pursue their education but at the same time earn a minimum wage and are entitled to GSIS accident insurance from work employment during school breaks. The wages and salaries are co-paid by employers (60 percent) and the government through education vouchers (40 percent).

Coverage is again problematic, as the SPES neglects out-of-school youth and dropouts. Indigenous peoples and Persons with Disabilities are not targeted at all. There are issues on the use of the education vouchers and delays in the payment of beneficiaries. There is mismatch between the SPES beneficiaries looking for work and the available jobs in the market.

Decent and affordable housing

The PDP 2017–2022 intends that for the period covered by the plan, the housing sector will deliver direct housing assistance to 1,558,711 households, mainly through the National Housing Authority (NHA)'s Housing Production, the Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC)'s Community-Driven Shelter Programs, and the Home Development Mutual Fund (HDMF) End-User Financing Program.

The targets and core indicators under the current PDP are the following:

TABLE 6 • National Shelter Program direct housing assistance targets

Program (in Households Assisted)	Agency	Total
NHA Housing Production	**NHA**	**835,203**
Resettlement for ISFs		333,078
Vertical Developments (LRBs)		2,754
AFP/PNP Housing Program		41.405
Settlements Upgrading		39,454
Cost Recoverable Housing (Employee's Housing)		24,100
High-Impact Projects (Mixed-Use Development)		15,800
Housing Assistance Program for Calamity Victims		378,612
(Permanent Housing)		(198,612)
(HOMA)		(180,000)
Total NHA without HOMA		655,203

TABLE 6 • National Shelter Program direct housing assistance targets *(continued)*

Program (in Households Assisted)	Agency	Total
Community Driven Housing Program	**SHFC**	**385,524**
Community Mortgage Program (CMP)		250,591
High Density Housing Program (HDHP)		134,934
Retail & Development Financing (Total)	**HDMF**	**516,957**
End-User Financing		516,957
Socialized Housing (SH)		147,980
Low Cost Housing (LC)		361,398
Medium Cost (MC)		5,391
Open Market (OM)		2,188
Total Direct Housing Provision		**1,558,711**

Source: HUDCC, cited in NEDA 2017, chap. 12: 6

The strategies adopted by the PDP 2017–2022 to achieve the targets for building safe and secure communities look pro-people and sound, adopting in particular, a "community-driven development approach," which encompasses the following:

(1) Develop integrated neighborhoods and sustainable communities particularly for low-income households;

(2) Intensify implementation of alternatives and innovative solutions in addressing the housing needs of the lower income classes and vulnerable sector;

(3) Strengthen decentralization of housing and urban development interventions;

(4) Adopt viable land acquisition approaches and fast-track the inventory of lands for socialized housing development;

(5) Mainstream program convergence budgeting in housing and resettlement, and innovative housing finance modalities;

(6) Strengthen partnerships with stakeholders;

(7) Adopt a community-driven development (CDD) approach in shelter provision towards safe and secure communities; and

(8) Strengthen housing as a platform to reduce poverty and improve social outcomes.

According to a study by the Institute for Popular Democracy and the Commission on Human Rights (2014), the gap in housing is estimated to be at six million. In Metro Manila alone, 1.5 million informal settler families (ISFs) do not have their own decent homes, and about 104,000 of them live along waterways and danger zones. Another 28,000 families in Valenzuela and Quezon City are affected by the North Luzon Expressway–C5 North Link Project and a bigger 107,000 ISFs are affected by the North–South Railways Project in the CALABARZON and Bicol Regions.

Consultations with urban poor groups have brought out that relocation to distant off-city resettlement sites is their least preferred option, largely because of the lack of access to water, electricity, and other essential services and facilities such as schools and hospitals. These sites also do not offer access to jobs, which forces them to take on job opportunities in other places (especially in areas closer to and in urban centers), and hence, incurring additional transportation costs.

In the PDP 2017–2022, it is the National Housing Authority (NHA) that is primarily in charge with providing direct housing assistance through the NHA Housing Production, targeting around 333,000 housing units for informal settlers and close to 379,000 for calamity victims.

Currently, the NHA is building housing units for more than 100,000 informal settler families (ISFs) in danger zones, but these are mostly in off-city resettlement sites. However, only 35,000 families have relocated to these NHA-built resettlement sites.

In contrast, the People's Plan, which is being forwarded by peoples' organizations and civil society formations (such as Kilos Maralita), pushes for in-city relocation. More than 32,000 families have resisted NHA relocation by developing their own housing projects. To date, 10,477 families that are previously living in danger zones and are members of 14 associations have successfully secured financing approval for their own in-city and near-city housing projects, while 13,756 families from 15 associations with fully-prepared proposals are looking for financing. Moreover, 7,831 families from 19 associations are still looking for land and are in the process of completing their housing proposals.

The proposed legislative agenda in the PDP 2017–2022 related to building safe and secure communities include:

TABLE 7 • Legislative agenda to build safe and secure communities

Legislative agenda	Rationale
Creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (DHUD)	Integrate all housing and urban development policies, plans, programs, and projects. This department will be the sole NSP entity for planning and policymaking, regulatory, program coordination, and performance-monitoring.
Creation of the Social Housing Development Finance Corporation (SHDFC)	Strengthen the role of the previously created SHFC (by virtue of Executive Order No. 272, s. 2007) by redefining the powers and functions of the President, Board of Directors and of the Corporation, providing incentives, and enabling the SHDFC to enter into loans and issue bonds and other debentures to raise funds for housing construction.
Passage of the National Land Use Act (NaLUA)	Establish a national land use framework that will define the indicative priorities for land utilization and allocation across residential, infrastructure, agricultural and protective uses; integrate efforts and monitor developments related to land use; and evolve policies, regulations and directions for land use planning processes.
Passage of the Comprehensive and Integrated Shelter Finance Act (CISFA) II	Enact the continuation of CISFA or RA 7835 to increase budget appropriation for the socialized housing program of the government, and significantly increase the provision of housing and tenure security to poor informal settlers in order to attain the SDGs.
Passage of the Idle Lands Tax	Promote the productive use of land by rationalizing taxation of idle lands, thereby repealing sections of RA 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991.
Creation of Local Housing Boards (LHBs) in every city/ municipality	Strengthen the roles of the LGUs in providing shelter to households through the mandatory establishment of local housing boards in every city and municipality.
Amendments to the NHMFC Charter	Strengthen its mandate to include the development of a secondary mortgage market for housing-related financial instruments and issuance of housing-related asset-backed securities.

Source: NEDA 2017, chap. 12: 11

Because of the continuing failure of the NHA to deliver a pro-people and pro-poor program and its inability to listen to and act on people's recommendations, preferences, and needs, there are increasing calls to dismantle the agency. Allegations of corruption have also hounded the agency, including cases in the construction of housing units for calamity victims. Thus, some urban poor groups are weighing on whether the legislative agenda of creating a Department of Housing of Housing and Urban Development will benefit them or otherwise.

Reliable and affordable water and power

The neoliberal framework, in which privatization and deregularization are the norm, has dominated even the provision of essential services. Basic commodities, such as water and power, are main sectors that big corporations always target because utility industries have a captured consumer market that has no other choice but to consume these services, thus gargantuan profits from these are ensured.

Water services in the country were previously regulated and managed by the government. However, in 2002, the sector got mired in debt, which was used by the government as justification for its privatization. Going into heavy indebtedness was allowed because of the water crisis that happened in 1997. During this time, the role of the private sector in the economy was increasing not just in the Philippines, but also in other countries in the region. At the same time, the World Bank and other neoliberal institutions were pushing the idea that the government will always be inefficient in providing services and that the huge costs of maintenance and resulting losses were draining the coffers of governments.

Two water concessionaires eventually won the bidding process for the provision of water services in Metro Manila and its surrounding environs. One of them is Manila Water, which currently services the eastern portion of NCR and some portions of the province of Rizal. Its bid contract amounted to almost Php 7.5 trillion, the largest in the world during its time. The government shouldered the debts of the water services system primarily because of the push of the World Bank and the ADB as part of the conditionalities that came with the financing and official development assistance (ODA) that they provided. It must be noted that when the private sector entered into this agreement, they promised to provide effective, easy, and efficient water services for the people. But more than one and a half decades later, there are poor communities that still do not have access to water services. Instead of providing access and coverage for all people to enjoy their basic rights to clean water and immediate access to public services, the cost of water services has been steadily going up.

Being a public utility, Manila Water is not allowed to pass its corporate income taxes to consumers, thus the government once barred the plans of the concessionaire to do such action. However, Manila Water filed a claim amounting to Php 79 billion against the Philippine government, along with a case that demanded immediate compensation worth Php 3.4 billion. The decision from the international arbitration ordered the Philippine government to pay the damages that Manila Water is asking for. The government has not yet paid the amount and is trying to source it from the corporation by imposing more taxes to the company. In turn, Manila Water passes it on to its customers. Now, the government is engaging peoples' organizations to mount a protest and claim their right to water access and to reverse the decision from the arbitration.

Access to water is a right and there is a need to fight to protect this right. Access to affordable, clean, sustainable, and quality water supply is a fundamental need that must be ensured for the benefit of the people.

Upon the passage of the Energy and Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA) of 2001, the same scenario happened to the power sector. The growing demand for power for industries and households called for the development of power facilities, but did not have an effect on the continuously increasing costs of power generation and distribution. The EPIRA's objective was to provide adequate access to electricity for all Filipinos, and at the same time, mandated power industries to be opened up to allow the private sector to compete against each other in order to bring down power costs and to provide more efficient service. Over the years, the cost of electricity being charged to households has increased substantially, making the Philippines one of the countries in Asia with the highest electricity costs.

Adequate, safe, and affordable food

According to the 2015 Global Hunger Index (GHI), the Philippines has a "serious" problem with hunger (IFPRI 2015).[12]

In addition, according to the Social Weather Stations (SWS), the percentage of Filipino families who rated themselves as hungry had increased more than double—from 8.3 percent to 18.3 percent—over a 15-year period (1999–2014) (SWS 2015). By the end of 2015, 11.7 percent of Filipino families suffered from involuntary hunger (SWS 2016), while 8.1 percent of all Filipinos suffered from subsistence poverty (PSA 2016b).

The 2013 National Nutrition Survey states that the country is confronted with a case of double-burden malnutrition: 20 percent of Filipino children below five years old are underweight, while 31 percent of Filipinos aged 20 and above are either overweight or obese. According to the 2015 GHI, the prevalence of wasting in children under the age of five is at 7.9 percent, while stunting in the same age group is at a very alarming level of 30.3 percent (IFPRI 2015).

It is also notable that agricultural workers, the landless and tenant farmers, the artisanal and small fisherfolk, the indigenous peoples, residents of rural, upland, and coastal communities, and urban workers—people who mainly produce and secure food for the country—are the ones who suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Moreover, the victims of hunger are mainly children and women.

There is currently no legislation that guarantees the right to food. There is, however, a pending bill on the right to adequate food called the Zero Hunger Bill, which is espoused by the Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN).

Summary of findings and recommendations

Specific findings and recommendations linked to DIGNIDAD's 8-point demands

On universal and guaranteed healthcare for all

Findings:

- The PhilHealth remains the main governmental scheme in addressing healthcare; however, medicines and health services are cost high because healthcare is commodified and there are no regulations in place to control the fees charged by healthcare providers.
- The Philippine healthcare system is still primarily geared towards curative rather than primary and preventive healthcare.
- There are still gaps and shortages in providing universal healthcare coverage (e.g., only 15 percent of children covered, low coverage for informal sector workers).

[12] The Philippines gained a GHI score of 20.1, which the GHI severity scale categorizes as "serious."

- Provision of healthcare services and benefits mainly use a targeting approach, but there are no standard targeting mechanisms at the local level, which could be subject to patronage and corruption.
- There is not enough budget allocation for core impact indicators, while hefty increases were made for addressing lifestyle-related diseases.

Recommendations:

- Engage the pending bill on universal healthcare and ensure the inclusion of provisions recommended by DIGNIDAD constituencies.
- Publish a policy brief on resisting the commodification of healthcare and the threats posed by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).
- Monitor closely and engage the government in the shaping of policies around trade and health.

On free and quality education up to the tertiary level

Findings:

- Aside from basic education, the PDP 2017–2022 should take advantage of targets on lifelong learning opportunities for all and higher technical education, because basic education will not be enough in building toward decent work and a life of dignity for all.
- The voucher scheme of the K to 12 Program promotes the privatization of education.
- The Public Investment Program (PIP) commits Php 8 billion annually for four years to fund free college education, but even the Php 16 billion budget for free tuition and expenditures in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs) in 2018 will only cover barely one-third of all college students.
- The draft Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Free Tuition Law is shaping up to favor private schools instead of public universities and colleges.
- The targets on quality learning set in the plan are too low.
- The PDP 2017–2022 core indicators do not cover the Alternative Learning System (ALS), despite being a major vehicle for out-of-school children and youth to get basic education outside of the formal education system.

Recommendations:

- Advocate for and disseminate human/people's capacity development, rather than human capital development, in education.
- Monitor the implementation of Republic Act No. 10931 and its IRR to guage its impact on disadvantaged students.
- Support student groups in their advocacy for a bill on automatic appropriation for full budgets needed by the K to 12 basic education program and by R.A. No. 10931 for tertiary education.
- Investigate the effects and the implementation of the voucher system for the senior high school, which is currently done through a PPP.

Living pension for older persons and adequate income support for vulnerable groups

Findings:

- The PDP 2017–2022 targets 100% coverage of social pension to poor indigent persons by 2022, but the amount is inadequate for a life of dignity.
- Social security coverage is inadequate that leaves out three million out of eight million people, and there are many implementation issues, especially in targeting.
- There is a large number of informal workers who cannot afford regular voluntary contributions for social security.
- The PDP 2017–2022 proposes unemployment insurance, but does not identify any strategy or mechanism to implement it.
- The main scheme of social protection for poor families and their children is the 4Ps or conditional cash transfer (CCT) which have increased access to school, although this program is still beset by targeting issues, has not contributed much to reducing poverty, and is also not sustainable and empowering.

Recommendations:

- Promote the concept of universal "living pension" and recommend a formula in arriving at a just amount.
- Determine which agency to engage for unemployment insurance and develop a DIGNIDAD policy analysis of this type of social protection.
- Engage for the passage of the bill on universal social pension and the development of its IRR.

On decent and affordable housing

Findings:

- The PDP 2017–2022 targets the housing sector to deliver direct housing assistance to 1.56 million households by 2022.
- The main agency responsible for this is the National Housing Authority (NHA), but to date, there is a housing gap of 6 million, and while there are 1.5 million informal settler families in Metro Manila alone, NHA is building only 100,000 housing units.
- The PDP 2017–2022 mentions strategies that sound good, such as integrated neighborhoods and sustainable communities for low income households and the fast-tracking of inventory of lands for socialized housing.
- In actuality, most resettlement housing is built off-city.

Recommendations:

- Promote the People's Plan concept and the models already developed by urban poor groups and studied by the Institute for Popular Democracy.
- Study and support pro-people provisions in the creation of a Department of Housing and Urban Development and in the passage taxation for idle lands.

General findings and recommendations

The PDP 2017–2022 uses terminologies used by progressives and civil society such as “universal,” “transformative,” and “social protection,” but the plan has a very different conception of these terminologies.

In terms of progressive realization of universality, the plan fails in a big way, especially with its preoccupation with targeting as a main approach in the delivery of public services. Moreover, we cannot take statistics and baseline indicators provided in the plan as gospel truth.

There are enough government resources or potential sources of funds, but the problem is in the allocation and prioritization of these funds. Even revenues from the TRAIN will allocate only 30 percent to social services.

There are laws and policy actions that have been given priority in the PDP 2017–2022 and there are those that were not. On the other hand, there are policies that progressive sectors have fought for and at the same time, were included in the plan, but these policies have received neither support nor needed adequate resources.

Beyond the question of how serious the government is implementing the plan by choosing effective strategies and allocating adequate funding, the more important thing to look into is how the provision of social protection in the PDP 2017–2022 is contributing towards breaking away from the old and existing neoliberal paradigm of development that puts profits of global business before people’s rights and welfare. This is the more fundamental transformation that should be sought for the welfare of all Filipinos.

Moreover, there is also no industrial policy mentioned in the PDP 2017–2022. Neither are there new strategies to create jobs. It mentions a strategy of formalizing the informal sector, but the plan speaks of no viable strategy or scheme to do this process.

The challenge to policymakers both at the executive and legislative branches is to recognize the weaknesses of the macroeconomic development strategy being promoted in the PDP 2017–2022 and to address the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment in the country. While the government’s commitment to the expansion, enhancement, and possibly even the universalization of some SP programs is laudable, there is no substitute to the formulation of a macroeconomic policy that is fully supportive of poverty reduction and social inclusion through the adoption of needed social and economic reforms that empower the masses and make them active participants in the building of a progressive Philippine economy and society. Programs like the CCT should eventually disappear once an integrated and coherent SP/macroeconomic program is put in place.

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