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PHILIPPINE JOURNEY TO “NO POVERTY” GOAL : CHALLENGES, TRENDS, AND INITIATIVES

MOHAMMAD-YUSOPH P. MAPIA*

Assistant Professor, Mindanao State University (Main Campus), Marawi City, Philippines

*Corresponding author: MOHAMMAD-YUSOPH P. MAPIA, Assistant Professor, Mindanao State University –Main Campus, Marawi City, Philippines

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Abstract

Poverty has been a problem in the Philippines. Corruption, unemployment, and low access to education are considered contributors to this undesirable phenomenon. Utilizing a systematic review approach, this paper aimed to describe the challenges of poverty in the Philippines, the poverty trends, and the initiatives and frameworks of the country for this problem. The review shows that the Philippines is on the right track considering the poverty trends of the country. Numerous policies and programs have been administered by the different departments and agencies to meet the “no poverty” goal of the country. Various frameworks have been formulated and updated as well. Hence, it is highly recommended that the country should remain steadfast and strengthen its monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that the country remains on the right track towards the goal.



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1. Introduction

Poverty has been a major problem in many countries, including the Philippines. Acknowledging the severity of the problem, leaders from 193 countries of the world united and agreed to end poverty as one of the goals under sustainable development goals. The Philippine government has been committed and dedicated to this endeavor by providing large amounts of budgetary requirements, administrations of policies and programs, and designing and developing strategic frameworks as manifested in every proposed people’s budget and Philippine Development Plan. Despite the decisions and actions of the Philippine government, this phenomenon has persisted. Hence, this paper aims to provide a systematic review to describe and comprehend the trends in poverty in the Philippines and the policies, programs, and initiatives thereof.

2. Methodology

The study aimed to describe and comprehend the severity of poverty in the Philippines. In particular, the paper aimed to know the poverty trends in the country and the numerous policies, programs, and strategies to achieve the ‘No Poverty’ goal. To achieve this aim, this paper utilized a systematic review to collect the required data. Existing literature from various journals, news articles, and statistical data from the Philippine Statistics Authority were collected, interpreted, and analyzed.

3. Challenges in poverty

Poverty is considered a major problem in the twenty-first century (Wagle, U., 2002). The World Bank defines poverty as the “lack of, or the inability to achieve, a socially acceptable standard of living” (Bellu, L. G., & Liberati, P., 2005). Whereas, the UN defined it as a “denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity” (Marlier, E., & Atkinson, A. B., 2010). It is a situation where people are living with low incomes and unable to meet basic needs and services required for their survival with dignity (Ng, A. H., Farinda, A. G., Kan, F. K., Lim, A. L., & Ting, T. M., 2013).

Following the conceptual model of Brady, D. (2019), the cause of poverty can be behavioral, structural, and political. Under behavioral factors, people are poor due to their engagement with poverty-increasing behavior such as low education and unemployment. Moreover, structural factors point out that poverty exists because of economic and demographic factors. Finally, poverty exists due to political factors driven by power relations and resource distributions. Pointedly, poverty is caused by corruption, unemployment, and low access to education (Ng, A. H., Farinda, A. G., Kan, F. K., Lim, A. L., & Ting, T. M., 2013).

According to Transparency International, corruption can take many forms, including public servants demanding or taking money or favors in exchange for services, politicians misusing public money or granting public jobs or contracts to their sponsors, friends, and families, and corporations bribing officials to get lucrative deals. Data shows that the Philippines has consistently been ranked as one of the countries with pervasive corruption, with an average score of 34 out of 100 in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International from 2018 to 2022 (Table 1).

Table 1. Philippine Corruption Perception Index 2018-2023



Year	Score	Rank
2023	34	115
2022	33	116
2021	33	117
2020	34	115
2019	34	113
2018	36	99
Average	34	113

Source: Transparency International (<https://www.transparency.org/en/>)

In 2022 data, an estimated 18.6 percent aged 5 to 24 years old, equivalent to 7.85 million children and youth, were not attending schools. This is higher compared to the data in 2016 and 2017 (Table 2). The figure is higher than the provided figures reported in 2017 and 2016, of which 9.1 percent or 3.56 million and 9.8 percent or 3.80 million were estimated as OSCY.

According to the official definition of the Philippine Statistics Authority, Out-of-School Children (OSCY) refers to family members aged 6-14 years old who are not attending formal school and family members aged 15-16 years old who are currently out of school, not gainfully employed, and have not finished college or post-secondary course. The following are identified reasons: Marriage/Family matters, High cost of education/financial concern, Lack of interest, finished schooling, and employment.

Table 2. Out-of-School Youth and Children aged 5-24 years: 2016, 2017, and 2022

Year	Population	Percentage	OSCY	Reasons
2016	38,971	9.8	3,807	• Marriage/Family matters • High cost of education/financial concern • Lack of interest
2017	39,214	9.1	3,568	• Marriage/Family matters • Lack of personal interest • High cost of education/financial concern
2022	42,185	18.6	7,856	• Finished Schooling • Employment • Lack of Interest

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

Unemployed persons refer to individuals who are reported as without work, that they are available for work, and taking steps to find work (Economic, Environmental, and Social Statistics, 2016). The same definition is adopted by the Philippine Statistics Authority per NSCB Resolution No. 15, Series of 2004. Pointedly, the data from the Philippine Statistic Authority shows the number of unemployed Filipinos in February 2024 was estimated at 1.8 million (Table 3).

Table 3. Unemployment Rate in the Philippines 2019-2024 in Percentage

Year/Month	Unemployment Rate (%)
2019 ^f	5.1
2020 ^f	10.3
2021 ^f	7.8
2022 ^f	5.4
2023 ^p	4.3
January ^f	4.8
February ^p	4.8
March ^p	4.7
April ^p	4.5
May ^p	4.3
June ^p	4.5
July ^p	4.8
August ^p	4.4
September ^p	4.5
October ^p	4.2
November ^p	3.6
December ^p	3.1
2024 ^p	4.5
January ^p	4.5 (2.15 million)
February ^p	3.5 (1.8 million)

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

4. Poverty Trends in the Philippines

This part presents the poverty trends in the Philippines. Table 4 presents the poverty incidence and magnitude of poor from 2006 to 2023. Table 5 presents the highest poverty incidence among families in 2006, 2009, and 2012. Table 6 presents the highest poverty incidence among families in 2012 and 2015. Lastly, table 7 presents the highest poverty incidence among families in 2018, 2021, and 2023.

Table 4 shows that in 2023, 16.4 percent, or 4.51 million Filipino families were estimated to be poor. This is lower than the figure in 2021, where 18.0 percent or 4.74 million Filipino families were estimated to be poor. However, it is almost the same as the 2018 figure, which estimated 16.2 percent or 4.04 million Filipino families to be poor. The data also shows that the 2023 figure is lower than previous figures in 2012, 2009, and 2006, where 19.7 percent or 4.21 million Filipino families, 20.5 percent or 4.04 million Filipino families, and 21.0 percent or 3.81 million Filipino families were estimated to be poor, respectively.

The same table shows that in terms of population, in 2023, 22.4 percent or 25.24 million Filipinos were estimated to be poor. This is lower than the figures in 2021 and almost the same as in 2018. In 2021, there were an estimated 23.7 percent or 26.14 million Filipinos and in 2018, 21.1 percent or 22.26 million

Filipinos were estimated to be poor. The 2023 figure is also much lower than the figures in 2012, 2009, and 2006. In those years, there were an estimated 25.2 percent or 23.75 million Filipinos, 26.3 percent or 23.30 million Filipinos, and 26.6 percent or 22.64 million Filipinos estimated to be poor.

Table 4. Poverty Incidence and Magnitude of Poor 2006-2023

Statistics	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	2023
Poverty Incidence (%)							
Families	21.0	20.5	19.7	16.5	16.2	18.0	16.4
Population	26.6	26.3	25.2	21.6	21.1	23.7	22.4
The magnitude of Poor (in millions)							
Families	3.81	4.04	4.21	3.75	4.04	4.74	4.51
Population	22.64	23.30	23.75	21.93	22.26	26.14	25.24

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

Table 5 presents the provinces with the highest poverty incidence in recent years. According to the reported data from the Philippines Statistics Authority, the following provinces consistently had the highest poverty incidence among families in 2006, 2009, and 2012: Camiguin, Eastern Samar, Lanao Del Norte, Lanao Del Sur, Maguindanao, Masbate, North Cotabato, Northern Samar, Sarangani, Western Samar, and Zamboanga Del Norte.

Table 5. Highest Poverty Incidence among Families: 2006, 2009, and 2012

Province	Poverty Incidence (%)		
	2006	2009	2012
Camiguin	31.4	20.4	41.0
Eastern Samar	41.3	49.2	55.4
Lanao Del Norte	33.1	39.7	41.4
Lanao Del Sur	38.6	48.7	67.3
Maguindanao	46.4	43.3	54.5
Masbate	44.6	44.4	40.6
North Cotabato	25.6	23.4	44.8
Northern Samar	44.6	42.8	43.5
Sarangani	41.7	47.5	46.0
Western Samar	32.3	34.9	43.5
Zambangoanga del Norte	60.3	60.3	48.0

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

In table 6, the provinces with the highest poverty incidence among families in both 2012 and 2015 are: Bukidnon, Lanao Del Sur, Maguindanao, Negros Oriental, Northern Samar, Sarangani, Sulu, and Zamboanga Del Norte. Finally, in table 7 shows the two provinces with the highest poverty incidence among families in 2018, 2021, and 2023: Basilan and Tawi-Tawai.

Table 6. Highest Poverty Incidence among Families: 2012 and 2015

Province	Poverty Incidence (%)	
	2012	2015
Bukidnon	41.5	47.0
Lanao Del Sur	67.3	66.3
Maguindanao	54.5	48.8
Negros Oriental	43.9	38.7
Northern Samar	43.5	47.9
Sarangani	46.0	47.3
Sulu	40.2	49.6
Zamboanga del Norte	48.0	41.1

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

Table 7. Highest Poverty Incidence among Families: 2018, 2021, and 2023

Province	Poverty Incidence (%)		
	2018	2021	2023
Basilan	65.5	46.7	46.7
Tawi-Tawi	17.7	39.5	50.5

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

5. Initiatives and Strategies

A) Strategic Frameworks

As mentioned above, the Philippine government has been designing, developing, and updating its strategic framework towards poverty alleviation. Figures 1, 2, and 3 present these strategic frameworks. First, this strategic framework is the strategic framework of the Philippine Development Plan 2011-201 (Figure 1). This framework emphasized inclusive growth as the desired outcome. This desired outcome can be achieved by 1) rapid and sustained economic growth, 2) equal development opportunities, sustainable and climate-resilient environment, and 3) poverty reduction in multiple dimensions and massive quality employment creation.

Macroeconomic stability, the competitiveness of productive sectors (e.g. agriculture, industry, and services), investments, market demand, access to financing, and job creation lead to rapid and sustained economic growth. On the other hand, education, skills, and health of the workforce, infrastructure, and science, tech, and innovation are equally important indicators that influence not only economic growth but equal development opportunities, and a sustainable climate-resilient environment as well. These can only be done with sound national security, good governance, and ecological integrity.

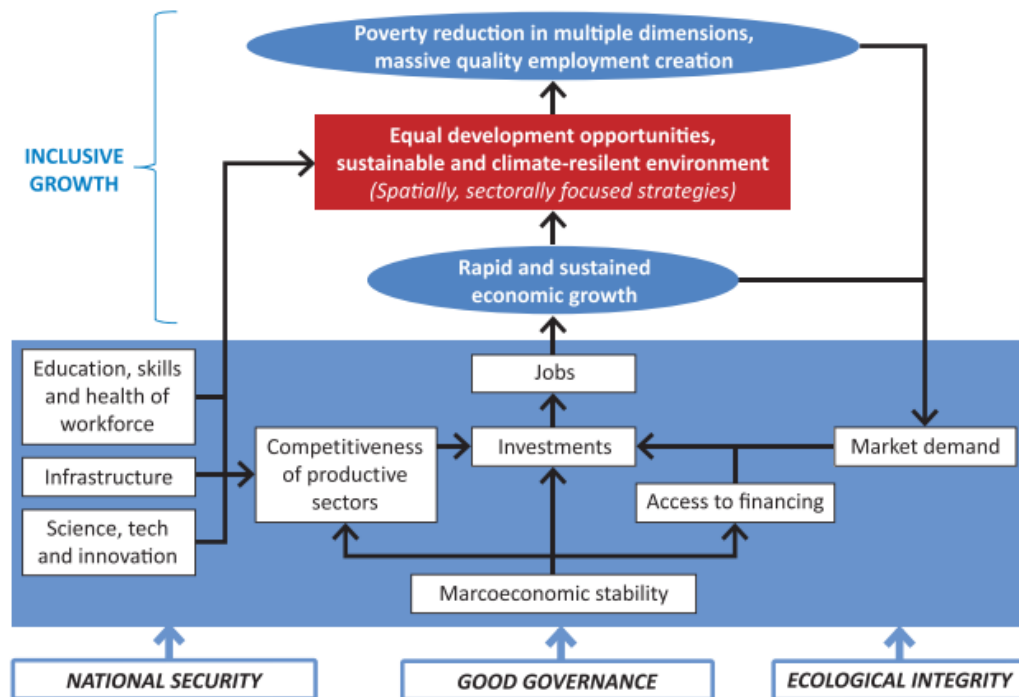


Figure 1. Strategy Framework of Philippine Development Plan 2011-2016
(Source: Philippine Development Plan 2011-2016)

Figure 2 shows the strategic framework of the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022. This framework presents the vision of the Philippine government for the Filipinos which is to have a “metatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay” by the end of 2022. The framework has the following targets: 1) Growth will be more inclusive as manifested by a lower poverty incidence in the rural areas, from 30 percent in 2015 to 20 percent in 2022, 2) The unemployment rate will decline from the current 5.5 percent to 3-5 percent in 2022, 3) There will be greater trust in government and society, 4) Individuals and communities will be more resilient, and 5) Filipinos will have a greater drive for innovation. The strategies to achieve these targets fall under three major pillars of 1) Enhancing the Social Fabric “Malasakit,” 2) Reducing Inequality “Pagbabago,” and 3) Increasing Growth Potential “Patuloy na Pag-unlad”.

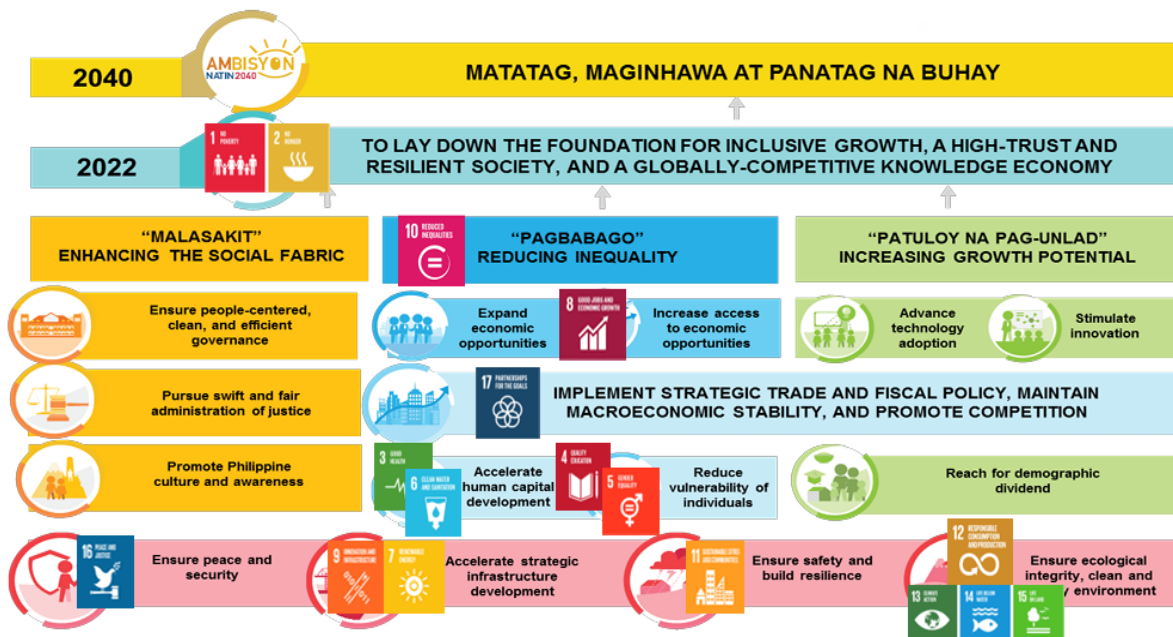


Figure 2. Philippine Development Plan Strategic Framework and SDGs 2017-2022

Source: Philippine Development Plan 2016-2022

Finally, figure 3 presents the strategic framework of Philippine Development Plan 202-2028 adopting a whole-of-society approach. The goal of the framework is to achieve economic and social transformation for a prosperous, inclusive, and resilient society with the following strategies: 1) develop and protect capabilities of individuals and families, 2) transform production sectors to generate more quality jobs and produce competitive products, and 3) an enabling environment encompassing institutions, physical and natural environment, which promotes a prosperous, inclusive and resilient society. These frameworks commit to achieving numerous target outcomes: 1) Maintain high levels of economic growth in the medium term, rising from 6.0 to 7.0 percent in 2023 to 6.5 to 8 percent from 2024 to 2028, 2) Transform the production sectors toward generating more and better-quality jobs, and enabling the competitiveness of enterprises in domestic and international markets, 3) Create more and better-quality jobs, 4) Reduce poverty incidence to 9 percent by 2028, 5) Keep food and overall prices low and stable, and 6) Ensure fiscal discipline.

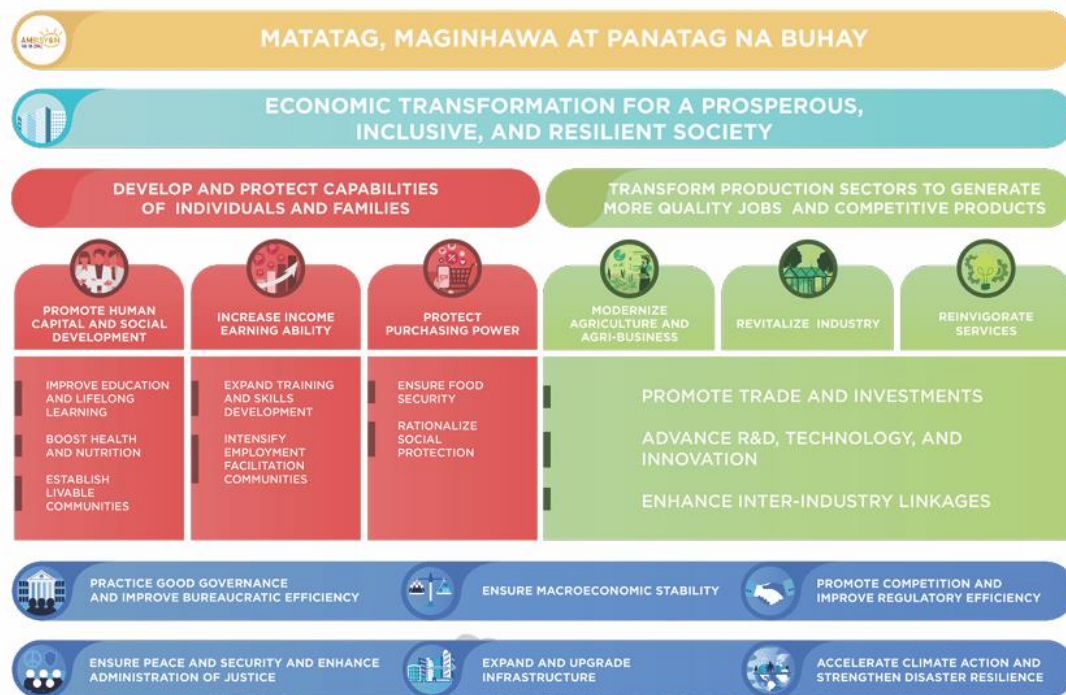


Figure 3. Strategy Framework of Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028

(Source: Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028)

B) Policies and Programs

Table 8 presents the departments and/or agencies that have policies and programs relevant to poverty alleviation in the Philippines. Primarily, these departments and/or agencies are policy-coordinating bodies and provide policy recommendations to address certain problems like poverty. The Philippine Government has been administering a multi-sectoral approach in its policies, programs, and strategies.

In the health sector, these policies and programs include 1) National Immunization Program, 2) Women, Men, and Children's Health Development Programs, 3) HIV/AIDS and STI Prevention, 4) Emerging, and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases, Food, and Waterborne Diseases Prevention and Control, and National Dengue Prevention and Control Programs, 5) Lifestyle Related Diseases Prevention and Control, and Essential NCDs Programs, 6) Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN), 7) Tutok Kainan Program, and 8) Barangay Nutrition Scholar (BNS) Program. In the educational sector, the government has administered the following policies and programs: 1) Basic Education Reform Agenda, 2) Food for School, 3) Adopt a School, 4) Programs for out-of-school youth and adults, 5) MATATAG Agenda, and 6) Scholarship programs such as Student Financial Assistance Programs, Students' Grants-in-aid Programs for Poverty Alleviation, and Scholarship Program for Coconut Farmers and their Families.

The government has also administered agricultural policies and programs to alleviate poverty, including 1) Production Support Services, 2) Market Development Services, 3) Extension Support, Education, and Training Support Services, 4) Research and Development, 5) Irrigation Network Services, 6) Provision of Agricultural Equipment and Facilities, 7) Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty, and 8) Massive greening program. In the economic sector, the government has the following policies and programs: 1) Credit to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises through the small businesses corporation, 2) Livelihood and training programs, 3) Technical assistance, 4) Coordination of Public Employment Service Offices, 5) Coordination of emergency and public workforce, 6) Livelihood and training programs for displaced workers, and 7) Technical and vocational programs through Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

Other initiatives include the development of Ambisyon Natin 2040 (Our Ambition 2040) representing the long-term vision and aspirations of the country in the next 25 years, that is “By 2040, Filipinos enjoy a strongly rooted, comfortable, and secure life.” In particular, the Philippines envisioned that no one is poor, no one is ever hungry. Moreover, the Philippine Development Plans have been providing strategic frameworks for poverty alleviation. Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino (4PS) and other social welfare programs have received budgetary support to alleviate poverty and increase access to education.

Table 8. Departments/Agencies with Policies and Programs Implemented for Poverty Reduction

Department/Agency	Role in Poverty Reduction	Policies and Programs
National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)	• Macroeconomic planning • Policy coordination for social development concerns and regional development • Secretariat for Investment Coordinating Council	• SDGs and Ambisyon Natin 2040 (Our Ambition 2040) • SDGs and Philippine Development Plan (e.g. PDP 2017-2022, PDP 2011-2016, and PDP 2001-2010) • Localizing the PDP-RM and the SDGs
National Anti-Poverty Commission	• Policy coordination for the implementation of the social reform and poverty alleviation agenda	• Information, Education, and Communication (IECs) Materials (e.g. Priority in-Person Voters (PPV)) • Gender and Development (GAD) (e.g. Good GAD Practices)
Department of Health	• Coordination in the delivery of health and related services from national to local governments • Policy formulation for health and related concerns	• National Immunization Program • Women, Men, and Children’s Health Development Programs • HIV/AIDS and STI Prevention, Emerging, and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases, Food and Waterborne Diseases Prevention and Control, and National Dengue Prevention and Control

		Programs • Lifestyle Related Diseases Prevention and Control, and Essential NCDs Programs
Department of Education	• Implementation and delivery of educational services and programs for basic and secondary levels • Policy recommendation for education-related issues	• Basic Education Reform Agenda • Food for School • Adopt a School • Programs for out-of-school youth and adults • MATATAG Agenda
Commission on Higher Education	• Policy coordination and regulation of tertiary education services	• Scholarship programs (e.g. Student Financial Assistance Programs, Students’ Grants-in-aid Programs for Poverty Alleviation, and Scholarship Program for Coconut Farmers and their Families)
Department of Social Welfare and Development	• Policy and program coordination in the delivery of social welfare services and other safety nets • Relief and rehabilitation during natural and human disasters	• KALAHI-CIDSS • Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) • Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) • National Household Targeting System – Poverty Reduction (NHTS-PR)
Department of Trade	• Policy coordination for investment toward job creation • Prices watch for consumer welfare	• Credit to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises through the small businesses corporation • Livelihood and training programs • Technical assistance
Department of Labor and Employment	• Policy coordination related to labor market issues and delivery of services related to the labor market (domestic and foreign)	• Coordination of Public Employment Service Offices • Coordination of emergency and public workforce • Livelihood and training programs for displaced workers • Technical and vocational programs through Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
Department of Agriculture	• Policy and program coordination related to agricultural services and development	• Production Support Services • Market Development Services • Extension Support, Education, and Training Support Services • Research and Development • Irrigation Network Services • Provision of Agricultural

		Equipment and Facilities.
Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)	Policy and program implementation related to agrarian reform (private land distribution–DAR; public lands–DENR)	- Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty - Massive greening program
Department of the Interior and Local Government	Policy and Program coordination related to local government concerns	- Minimum basics needs indicators - Promotion of community-based monitoring system and local poverty action offices
Housing and Urban Development Council	Policy and program coordination related to housing and shelter	Community Mortgage Program, resettlement programs
National Disaster Coordinating Council	Policy and program coordination related to disaster response and management	- Hazard mapping - Disaster preparedness for LGUs
National Nutrition Council	Policy and program coordination related to nutrition and hunger	- Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN) - Tutok Kainan Program - Barangay Nutrition Scholar (BNS) Program
PhilHealth	Government corporation in charge of the delivery of social health insurance and social security	Membership promotion with LGUs, cooperatives, and NGOs
Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor	Policy and program coordination related to urban poor	Antidemolition of community mortgage programs
National Commission on Indigenous Peoples	Policy and program coordination and assistance related to indigenous people	- Land Tenure Program - Indigenous people's human rights
Cooperate Development Authority	Policy and program coordination related to cooperative programs	- Registration of cooperatives - Regulatory guidelines and standards setting
Philippine Statistics Authority	Policy and actual collection of poverty information across regional and local units	- Statistical Survey Review and Clearance System - Data Request
LGUs (province, city, municipality, barangay)	Forefront in the delivery of basic services and poverty reduction projects	Models found in Galing Pook awards: Bohol, Iloilo, Marikina, etc.

Source: Asian Development Bank (2009)
National Economic and Development Authority (<https://neda.gov.ph/>)
National Anti-Poverty Commission (<https://napc.gov.ph/>)
Department of Education (<https://www.deped.gov.ph/>)
Commission on Higher Education (<https://ched.gov.ph/programs-and-projects/>)



Department of Social Welfare and Development (<https://fo3.dswd.gov.ph/>)
National Nutrition Council (<https://nnc.gov.ph/>)

C) Social Protection Programs

Tables 9 and 10 show the social protection programs of the Philippine government. These programs have been receiving budgetary support in recent years. These programs include Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program (4Ps), Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens, Unconditional Cash Transfer Program, Supplementary Feeding Program, Protective Services for Individuals and Families in Difficult Circumstances, Sustainable Livelihood Program, and National Health Insurance Program.

Table 9. Philippine Social Protection Programs

Programs	Budgetary Support				
	2017	2019	2020	2021	2022
<i>Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program (4Ps)</i>	78.2 B	89.8 B	108.8 B	106.8 B	115.7 B
Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens	158.3 B	23.2 B	23.2 B	23.5 B	23.7 B

Source: Philippine People’s Budget 2017-2022

Table 10. Other Social Protection Programs

Programs	Budgetary support	Year
Unconditional Cash Transfer Program	37.6 B	2019
	36.5 B	2020
Supplementary Feeding Program	3.5 B	2019
Protective Services for Individuals and Families in Difficult Circumstances	8.7 B	2020
	18.0 B	2021
Sustainable Livelihood Program	4.3 B	2021
National Health Insurance Program	80.0 B	2021

Source: Philippine People’s Budget 2017-2022



6. Implication and Recommendation

The achievement of the ‘No Poverty’ goal requires commitment and dedication as manifested in the various government undertakings. The Philippine government has administered numerous courses of action toward poverty alleviation in the form of policies, programs, and frameworks following a Multi-sectoral Approach and a Whole-of-Society Approach. The government also administered social protection programs for the same. Significantly, as can be seen in the trends of poverty in the country, the government’s initiatives are on the right track. Amidst challenges, the government is taking its step toward the goal. Hence, it is recommended to strengthen the government monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that the government initiatives are working according to their mandates and objectives and in line with its existing approaches and frameworks.

7. Author(s) Contribution

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

8. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

9. Plagiarism Policy

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will taken care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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