

# Where are the Poor in the Philippines? Some Sectors Invisible in Official Poverty Map

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Official poverty statistics in the Philippines is a sham because it fails to disclose the real state of poverty in the Philippines, even consigning some sectors into non-existence, the Philippine coalition of the global anti-poverty alliance Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) said.

“There are some sectors that are invisible in the official poverty map. The government has said that there are about 26 million poor Filipinos, but if there are 45 million Filipinos who say they are poor, then there is almost 20 million Filipinos who are not accounted for,” said GCAP-Philippines coordinator Lui Rogado.

The November 2007 Self-Perception survey of the Social Weather Station (SWS) shows that one out of two Filipinos see themselves as poor (52 percent of the population), this despite the lowering of the Self-Rated Poverty Threshold.

“Poverty may be far worse than what the government wants us to believe since there are Filipinos who are not included in the surveys, such as the ambulant and transient poor, as well as the Indigenous People,” said Sabino G. Padilla, Jr. President of AnthroWatch, an organization working with indigenous peoples and a member of the GCAP-Philippines Coordinating Committee.

“The question is, do we actually know where the poor are?” said Padilla. Padilla led the launching of AnthroWatch’s latest poverty maps, which shows the threshold, incidence and magnitude of poverty in the country. The launch, held at Greenhouse Grill in Quezon City, gathered members of Kalipunan ng mga Samahang Maralita sa Pilipinas (KaSaMa-Pilipinas), Social Watch Philippines, Kabataan Kontra Kahirapan, among others, which are members of GCAP-Philippines. The maps were based on the 2003 official report of the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB).

The poverty maps show as well the 181 Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims (CADC) and 57 Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADT) areas. Padilla said it is odd that the indigenous peoples are not part of the sectors considered to be living with poverty. The maps show, however, that the areas inhabited by indigenous peoples have high poverty incidence.

“The government has made us invisible along with the indigenous peoples,” said Teody Gacer of the urban poor group KaSaMa-Pilipinas. “There are a lot of urban poor settlements that are not reflected in the official poverty map, even on the map of local governments. The ambulant and transient poor, who live under bridges, road islands, and along the streets, are invisible. Perhaps the government really wants to hide the poor. The less poor Filipinos, the better the government looks.”

“Interestingly, why is it that despite the indecently low poverty threshold in the rural areas, poverty incidence is still high, perhaps the magnitude of poverty is much worse than what the incidence is telling,” Padilla noted.

“The government is trumpeting it’s supposed gains on achieving the MDGs, but if the picture of poverty that they are using is not comprehensive and accurate then how can the Millennium

Development Goals be achieved?" Rogado said.

"This regime keeps on allocating billions of pesos to their palliative hunger and poverty mitigation programs, but if the visible poor do not even benefit from these stop-gap measures, what more the invisible poor?" Rogado added. "What is the National Anti-Poverty Commission doing, which the President herself is on-top of doing? Is NAPC another waste of our funds?"

"To provide social safety nets for poor Filipinos, the limited funds that the government has should be maximized by allocating these to social services such as health and education," shared Prof. Leonor Briones, Co-Convenor of Social Watch Philippines. "The Alternative Budget grounded on the MDGs that we are presenting to the Senate should be adapted, to insure additional funds to these services."

But more than half of the 1.227 trillion peso national budget, a total of P624.09 billion is allocated for debt service alone.

The 2008 Alternative Budget, an initiative of 48 civil society groups led by Social Watch Philippines, Freedom from Debt Coalition, GCAP-Philippines, Education Network, WomanHealth Philippines, PS Link, amongst others and opposition legislators that proposes to allocate only about 22.8 billion pesos of unprogrammed funds into specific services such as health, education, environment, and agriculture which covers four MDGs.

"The government should first produce a more inclusive, comprehensive and accurate picture of poverty in order for the billions of pesos it allocates for its anti-poverty and hunger mitigations programs be made effective," said GCAP-Philippines. "It should be SOP for the government to know where its poor constituencies are in order to create programs that respond to their specific needs," he continued.

The Philippine government is signatory to the United Nations Millennium Declaration, of which the first Millennium Development Goal is to reduce poverty in the country by half by 2015.

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\* Global Call to Action Against Poverty-Philippines (GCAP-Philippines) is a citizens movement that utilizes various strategies such as media and mobilization demanding and challenging the Philippine government to live up to it's promise to the Millennium Development Goals and to protect and promote the rights of Filipinos to have a decent and dignified life.

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