

Human Development Must Wear a Human Face: Reflections on a 15-Year Journey

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Human Development Must Wear A Human Face: Reflections on a 15-Year Journey

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For some of us, **human development** started as an intellectual journey in search of ordinary life meanings. For the leading others, it was a challenging academic exercise in thinking through identifying, defining, and calibrating the available appropriate empirical referents that would stand for outcomes that expand those capabilities which make life humane. That **human development** must relate to outcomes or results was particularly attractive because it is defined as “the process of enabling people to have wider choices.”

In an address to new members of an honor society, Castillo [1995] focused on the theme, “The privileges we enjoy and the choices we make.” Her message:

No matter where life may take you, be grateful that you have the privilege of making choices. Others are not as blessed as you are. Be a Renaissance person and make a difference in whatever you choose to do but do this for others not just for yourself. Only then can we share our privilege. Be a working hero (not a dead one) so that those you touch may have the privilege of making choices and enjoying the right to be what they want to be. This is what HUMAN DEVELOPMENT is all about.

That said, one realizes that in the Human Development Community, what the heart could feel, the mind must evidence. For how do we know what, where, when, or how much of the outcomes have been achieved? Tribute must be paid to the pioneers who picked and tried the indicators and put them logically, statistically, and substantively together in a metric called the *human development index* or HDI. The most important dimensions of human capabilities relate to “a person’s physical survival and health level of knowledge, livelihood or income, and political freedom.” Quite a novelty in a community where economists wield awesome influence. The first *Philippine Human Development Report* (PHDR 1994) stated explicitly:

Human well-being improves when incomes rise or when command over commodities expands. At the household or family level, an adequate source of livelihood is needed to raise well-being. But high income and well-being are not always synonymous...Higher incomes represent only means. Incomes are not outcomes.

By 2008/2009, this concept was more concretely operationalized and quantified in “the *human poverty index* (HPI), which captures deprivation beyond that of income poverty alone. While the HDI measures overall *progress* in three dimensions of human development, the HPI measures *deprivation* in the same dimensions: longevity, as measured by the probability at birth of not surviving to age 40; knowledge, as measured by the adult illiteracy rate; and overall economic provisioning both public and private, as measured by the percentage of people not using improved water sources and the percentage of children under five who are underweight. An HPI closer to zero indicates greater progress in reducing relative deprivation.”

All those dimensions of everyday life contribute to the HDI. That the HDI and its components have been developed and made possible at the provincial level is already a major step toward putting a *human face* to human development. But more needs to be explored, such as how to measure *political freedom*.

If an indie film were to be made on Philippine human development, what would the storyline and images be in the “highs” and the “lows” of HDI? **Table 1** attempts to visualize what such a film might project in an artistic but realistic scenario. The overall HDI rank and its underlying components are detailed from which the “best” in HDI (Benguet) and the “worst” in HDI (Maguindanao) from 1997 to 2006 might be creatively imagined. Needless to say, people in Benguet live longer than those in Maguindanao, receive more education and are more literate, have higher income but lower HPI, and have greater access to improved water sources.

Table 1
The comparative metrics of human development in Benguet and Maguindanao, 1997-2006

Benguet				Maguindanao			
1997	2000	2003	2006	1997	2000	2003	2006
Human development index (HDI) rank among 77 provinces							
8	3	1	1	71	73	75	75
Life expectancy at birth (in years)							
66.9	68.9	71.0	72.9	54.7	55.6	56.6	57.6
High school graduates 18 and above (in percent)							
66.9	64.7	65.3	76.6	33.8	36.1	28.9	40.6
Primary and high school enrolment rate (in percent)							
94.1	94.8	94.8	93.8	79.9	76.6	81.2	75.2
Per capita income (in pesos)							
31,107	32,512	35,219	36,355	21,428	16,002	14,807	15,681
Poverty incidence							
23.1	13.7	14.3	12.7	27.5	31.9	47.3	45.3
Human poverty index (HPI) rank							
	13.3	12.5	14.0		28.8	33.7	33.4
HPI Rank			30				77
Functional illiteracy, 2003 (in percent)							
		10.9				44.0	
Population not using improved water sources, 2006 (in percent)							
			14.2				45.6

Source: *Philippine Human Development Report 2008/2009*

What is missing in these scenarios is the literally hidden accouterment of absolute power and control by the authority in power over the local populace, apparently with the supportive hand of the highest central authority. In the usual innovativeness of the Human Development Network (HDN), can we find the “fitting” indicators of such power and control at the provincial level so we can identify and rank provinces according to risk of being inhuman?

Individual, institutional, global values: Context of human development

What does it take to be *human*?

Prof. Urie Bronfenbrenner, a well-known Cornell University professor of human development and family life, said:

The family is the most powerful, most human and by far, the most economical system for making human beings human.

This was more than five decades ago. In the meantime, the world has become “smaller,” more connected and interdependent although not always in a harmonious relationship. There is internationality in humanity where nobody is immune from somebody else’s actions regardless of geography, color, ethnicity, creed, ideology, gender, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, the kind of family we are born into and raised is not independent from the dimensions of the HDI.

For a glimpse into the different values in the context of human development, here are some thoughts from diverse minds:

“Poverty means never having quite enough to eat.”—a panhandler from the United States [UNDP 1997:16].

“We can survive only together. I need you to be me and you need me to be you.”— Bishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Laureate

“Individual commitment to a group effort. This is what makes a team work, a society work and a civilization work.”—Vince Lombardi, former Green Bay Packers coach [Kalinga Institute for Social Sciences n.d.]

The University of the Philippines as the National University was called upon to be the bastion of secular morality in the country, to instill in its graduates a *“pre-eminent sense of duty to society and the nation and the deep loss of honor and self-worth should they fail to fulfill minimum civic demands.”*—Emmanuel de Dios [2008]

The view from the outside stressed that *“U.P.—possessing human and intellectual capital, a history of independent and critical thinking, the trust and confidence of the people, and alumni of influence is best suited for the task of fighting corruption.”*—Ramon R. del Rosario Jr. [2008]

“The present Age of Globalization must now be supplemented by an Age of Global Cooperation, where shared goals motivate diverse stakeholders to pull in the same direction.”—Dennis J. Snower [2009]

All these quotes suggest that the context of human development starts from the individual but its essence lies in the imperative of social interaction which defines being and becoming human. Nowadays, the call is for “comprehensive responsibility for our common destiny.” Secular morality, ethical literacy is what we live, not what we read. When the legal dominates over what is moral and ethical, the humaneness in human development is reduced to what the courts and lawyers say, which poor people rarely ever get to hear.

The responsibilities of educational institutions, especially those of a national university, are great indeed, considering that Filipino people pay for it. It does not take many alumni to do damage and dishonor expectations. At least two alumni might meet this criterion.

But when we are in solidarity with the rest of the world in matters that make a difference in human development, we may find a way to add to or subtract from the national HDI. How the rest of the world sees us must be of consequence.

For example, the Transparency International in 2008 ranked the Philippines 141st out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perception Index. The Philippines shared that place with Yemen, Cameroon, and Iran. The country also ranked lowest among the largest

economies of Southeast Asia. In 2006, the World Competitiveness Survey by the Switzerland-based Institute for Management Development ranked the Philippines 60th on bribery and corruption among 61 countries surveyed.

The World Bank’s *Worldwide Governance Indicators 2008* showed the Philippines at the bottom of the list among the top 10 economies of East Asia. The country scored lowest in “control of corruption” and “political stability.” Most recently, it earned the dubious distinction of having made 2009 the deadliest year ever for journalists, according to the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists. Thirty journalists were among those killed “in one go” in the Maguindanao massacre [*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2008].

On the bright side, street educator Efren Peñaflorida, along with the Dynamic Team Company volunteers and their mentor, did the country proud as “CNN Hero of the Year” and Manny Pacquiao as the world’s pound-for-pound boxing king.

Gains, losses due to population-related actions

Despite all the statistical, scientific, and glaring human evidence, political and church leaders have blocked action on population and reproductive health issues. Yet United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has declared that “the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)...cannot be achieved if questions of population and reproductive health are not squarely addressed.” The World Health Organization (WHO) has documented the contribution that reproductive health can make to the achievement of the MDGs and the possible obstacles to their achievement that could result from lack of access to reproductive health care. **Table 2** is an alternative way of arguing the case for human development.

Table 2

The MDGs with and without to reproductive health care

<p>MDG-1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</p> <p>With reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lower fertility, slower population growth, greater economic growth, reduced poverty ▪ Greater freedom of women to participate in the labor force, with consequently greater equality of income and less poverty <p>Without reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher population growth rate and risk of food insecurity ▪ More teenage births and shorter intervals between births ▪ Greater risk of perpetuation of poverty from one generation to the next
<p>MDG-2: Achieve universal primary education</p> <p>With reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fewer children, therefore more education resources for each child, better school performance ▪ Reduced child labor <p>Without access to reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low pupil retention rates, especially for girls ▪ Girls burdened with sibling care, with little time for school work
<p>MDG-3: Promote gender equality and empower women</p>

<p>With reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Later marriage and greater opportunities throughout life ▪ Greater male participation in reproductive health and less domestic violence ▪ Greater bargaining power for women in decisions about sexual behavior and childbearing <p>Without reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued harmful practices and violence against women ▪ Continuing low status of girls and women
<p>MDG-4: Reduce child mortality</p>
<p>With reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lower risk of newborn, infant, and child morbidity and mortality ▪ Better understanding of hygiene, baby feeding, and childrearing ▪ Better parenting skills <p>Without reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More children born into large families and thus more likely to be nutritionally and emotionally deprived ▪ Families less exposed to baby-friendly health initiatives and baby-care practices
<p>MDG-5: Improve maternal health</p>
<p>With reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced maternal morbidity and mortality ▪ Availability of emergency obstetric and antenatal, delivery and postpartum care ▪ Fewer births and greater spacing between births <p>Without reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less access to contraceptives and choice in family planning ▪ More deliveries attended by unskilled persons ▪ More serious consequences from complications of pregnancy and delivery ▪ Increased maternal mortality and morbidity
<p>MDG-6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases</p>
<p>With reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better understanding about how HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections are contracted and prevented ▪ Greater ability to negotiate safe sexual behavior, thereby reducing risk of sexually transmitted infections ▪ Greater public understanding and appreciation of sexual health <p>Without reproductive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater risk of mother-to-child transmission of infection from lack of antenatal care and suitable preventive medication ▪ Greater risk of HIV/AIDS as a result of fewer diagnostic examinations and treatment for sexually transmitted infections ▪ Greater risk of HIV/AIDS from earlier onset of sexual activity and reduced access to

contraceptives
MDG-7: Ensure environmental stability
With reproductive health care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced role of women in resource management
Without reproductive health care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Larger population growth, with greater migration to crowded urban slums ▪ Greater pressure on food and water security ▪ Greater extension of population movement into forested areas, marginal land, and fragile ecosystems

Source: Adapted from the table on the UNFPA Website. Retrieved June 24, 2008, from <http://www.unfpa.org/icpdmdgs-rh>

Fr. John J. Carroll [2004] writes this unexpected view of family size and the poor:

[The] Church’s natural family planning program (NFP) is reaching so few. While vigorously opposing distribution of contraceptives by the government and refusing to collaborate with the latter even in NFP, [it] seems unable to develop a program of its own which is proportionate to the need...In the meantime, unless something is done about family size among the poor, the tragedies of childhood malnutrition, street children, and child laborers will continue, on this, history and the Lord of history can be unforgiving.

Longevity, gender, and poverty

In looking for one summary health indicator which would be roughly parallel to poverty incidence, *life expectancy at birth* seems to be an appropriate statistic which is available not just at the national but at the provincial level. A simple correlation between the 2003 poverty incidence and longevity showed a -0.506 value (statistically significant at the p.01 level), which means the higher the poverty incidence, the shorter the life expectancy.

Over a period of 43 years (1960 to 2003) life expectancy increased from 52.8 to 69.8 years. The top 10 provinces in life expectancy registered an average of 71.3 years and 19.6 poverty incidence. Provinces with the lowest life expectancy of 56.8 (average) had 58.55 poverty incidence. The difference between the top 10 and bottom 10 provinces is 14.57 years in life expectancy and 38.95 in poverty incidence. Clearly, the poor do not live as long as the wealthy. Although “health is wealth” is a popular slogan, it is wealth that “buys” health.

But the more interesting finding is the gender factor in life expectancy. In 2003, females were expected to live 72.4 years while males, 67.2. The difference is 5.2 years that the female will outlive the male. The 10 provinces with the largest gender difference in life expectancy range from 7.4 years in Basilan to 10.9 years in Cebu. The 10 provinces with the smallest longevity differences between females and males range from 0.2 years in Quirino to 3.2 in Davao del Sur. Incidentally, the female advantage over the male was observed in all provinces, including the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). As a matter of fact, Basilan females could expect to live 7.4 years longer than the males [Castillo 2009].

Does this mean Filipino females are healthier than their male counterparts even in high-poverty provinces? If they are, why?

If we were to use longevity as a source of evidence for research prioritization in favor of the disadvantaged group, the research agenda could tilt toward male health problems. To add to this definition of “disadvantage,” Maligalig and Albert [2008] found that “among children with ages six to 11 years, those who belong to the bottom 30 percent of the income decile are 2.8 times more likely to be out of school than those in the upper 70 percent income group.

The results also indicate that boys are more likely not to attend schools than girls. These have very real implications for young people in high school and in the university, particularly with regard to boy-girl relationships. Perhaps more girls will marry younger men with lower education and even lower income than theirs.

For other insights relevant to gender equity issues, Quisumbing, Estudillo, and Otsuka [2008] share these findings:

- The current pattern of intergenerational transfers in the child generation, whereby sons inherited 0.15 hectares of additional land and daughters received 1.5 more years of schooling, is *egalitarian*. Average predicted incomes of sons are not significantly greater than the average predicted annual incomes of daughters.
- At all age ranges in the life cycle, daughters earn more nonfarm income, whereas sons earn more from farm income using larger areas of inherited land. Yet income differences between sons and daughters at all ages are not statistically significant.
- Thus, parents bequeath more land to sons and favor daughters in schooling investments in order to equalize incomes between sons and daughters, while exploiting the comparative advantage of sons in farming and of daughters in nonfarm work.

Women: Then, now, and tomorrow

In 1976, a 263-page research report funded by the Council for Asian Manpower Studies (CAMS) was completed. At that time it was probably the first and most comprehensive data-based description of the Filipino female in relation to the Filipino male. Rural, urban, regional, provincial, and some international data, including time series comparisons, were available for some parameters. The report of Castillo [1976], “The Filipino Woman as Manpower: The Image and the Empirical Reality,” was done before the concept of **gender** came into active use. Nowadays, “manpower,” in reference to working women, is no longer politically correct.

The first part of the study presents images of the Filipina in history, in the contemporary world, in a double-vision, and in a romantically feminine role as projected in metropolitan newspapers and magazines. One interesting image comes from the former dean of the U.P. College of Law, Irene R. Cortes [1974]:

The feminist movement in this country has progressed without sacrifice of femininity or arousing male antagonism. There have been no strident voices nor bra burning, but there have been male champions of women’s rights. The low-key struggle for recognition of their cause has at times been taken for acquiescence in the state of things, but the Filipino woman knowing her own milieu chooses to effect change in her own way, not for her the aggressive, abrasive stance but the more subtle approach. She impresses men into the feminist cause—men are reasonable creatures after all, but the Filipino woman does not expect them to hand over in a silver platter what society has long conceded to men.

The Philippine Representative to the Commission on the Status of Women, Leticia R. Shahani [1973], said of the ideal woman:

[F]emininity should not be the basic criterion for judging a woman. I think women should be judged on their capacity to be human beings. It is their humanity not their femininity that counts. Some of the so-called feminine types can be egoistic, selfish, pretty, and limited. A woman's humanity should be measured by her capacity to love, and by this, I mean not only sexual love but also her aptitude for giving her time and effort to help others without wishing to possess them. She should also be judged by the product of her intellect and spirit.

Most feminine of all is her thesis that:

A woman executive can be charming, mysterious, and even seductive, and if she understands womanhood, she will succeed in being charming, mysterious, and seductive without even trying.

The second part of this research report moves from imagery to empirical reality, presenting a comprehensive data profile on the following 10 aspects of the Filipino woman's life:

- As a demographic statistic
- As a matrimonial risk taker
- As a childbearer
- As an adolescent
- As a recipient of education
- As a migrant
- As a member of the labor force
- As a working wife
- As a decisionmaker
- As a participant in politics in formal organizations and in church activities

This report can provide a historical benchmark against which gender specialists can assess how far the Filipino woman has "traveled." It must be said, however, that it is necessary to "segment" women in order to be faithful to empirical reality. Some women are much more "equal" than many, many others. Which women are more vulnerable to domestic violence? When women rise to managerial and top-level positions, despite marriage and children, is it because men have been willing to share in household responsibilities, or is it because low-income women and men perform these traditional functions for her? Do these "domestics" receive human treatment from their employers?

Where wives are household managers of meager finances, do they become more responsive to livelihood opportunities? Microfinance leaders report that women are more dependable users of credit. For those who have chosen to work abroad, are they and their families better off in the HPI? We have had two female presidents. Have they been more supportive than male presidents in gender concerns? What about the long-surviving females? Have their longer lives been worth living beyond what the males have enjoyed?

Other routes to education, access, and quality

“Quality is as important as access” was a pronouncement from the Fourth East Asia Pacific Ministerial Consultation organized by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Bangkok in 1998. Between the dilemma of quality or equity comes a navigational statement from the same meeting:

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much but whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

Quality, they also said, can come “bottom up” and not only “top down.” But these are slogans; in real life, it is more a case of “reach out” and “pull up.” “Equal but poor” in quality should not be our goal in promoting equity in access to education. Even on a selective basis, provided the schools are in different parts of the country, investments must be made not as pro-poor or pro-elite but as potential “seed multipliers” that will produce more and more of those intellectual types, so that today’s precious elites will no longer be as elite as before. In other words, invest in schools that will produce ethically literate intellectual elites who will shape the thoughts of the next generation, beyond Manila.

Nobody, particularly the poor, wants to perpetuate mediocrity and poor quality education because they suffer most from it. Education as a way out of poverty diminishes its value when parents pay hard-earned income to send their children to schools only to be nonpassers in board exams, nonqualifiers in employment prospects, and low scorers in achievement tests.

There is a misconception among non-educationists that educationists regard education as their “turf” with less than a warm welcome to those outside of it [Castillo 2000]. As the *Philippine Human Development Report 2000* puts it:

The current system fails sufficiently to harness the support of local governments, families, communities, and civil society, in general, in the process of education.

One hopes that as we address the issue of quality, education will be defined more inclusively by the education establishment. Actually, there are many innovative initiatives in partnership with or beyond the school system whether for children or adults. How can we tap into these initiatives proactively, so they eventually become mainstream in a shared vision of “Quality education for all”?

Some of these innovations with exciting results are the Foundation for Worldwide People Power, with Education Revolution as its advocacy; League of Corporate Foundations; Synergeia Foundation; Philippine Business for Education; Alternative Learning Systems; Education Nation, which affirmed that education is “the most powerful means out of poverty, ignorance, exclusion, and war”; Ateneo Center for Education; Ayala Foundation’s Social Action Center; Metrobank Foundation; Philippine Business for Social Progress; Read-Along Projects, along with reading skills promotion in *Sa Pagbasa Sisikat Ka*; discussions on the Basic Education Cycle; and the Payatas, Lupang Pangako, Quezon City schools under the leadership of Benjamin Caling and the educational support by the Ateneo Center for Educational Development. The schools in the dumpsite area moved from No. 94 among 96 schools in Quezon City to No. 9 in five years.

Dr. Christopher C. Bernido and Dr. Ma. Victoria C. Bernido, Third Gawad Haydee Yorac awardees, established the Bohol Research Center for Theoretical Physics that is dedicated to building a nation through science, research, values, excellence, and a new method of

teaching. That this physicist-researcher-educator couple chose to dedicate their lives to this task in Jagna, Bohol shows there is no place too small for large talents to share.

In addition to this multitude of education quality multipliers, conditional cash transfers and school feeding programs should be monitored and assessed with respect to their impact on sustained schooling and learning.

At the minimum, there should be a relentless pursuit of zero functional illiteracy, particularly in high HDI provinces, and a significant reduction in high functional illiteracy provinces. For example, why should Benguet, a top HDI province, still have 10.9 percent functional illiteracy; Pampanga, 12.7 percent; Ilocos Norte, 16.8 percent; Iloilo, 18.4 percent; and Tarlac, 22.5 percent? Needless to say, the challenge to their governors lies in the highest functional illiteracy provinces like Maguindanao, 44 percent; Tawi-tawi, 43 percent; Sarangani, 43 percent; Basilan, 35.4 percent; Davao Oriental, 33.5 percent; Catanduanes, 35.5 percent; and Western Samar, 33.9 percent.

The value of being able to read is depicted by Robert S. Salva [2008]:

Most of the development initiatives do not touch upon the discourses going on in the mind of the poor and the sidelined. There may be livelihood projects, but do you know that many urban poor are paralyzed when they are asked to fill up a bio-data or to take a personality test? Gawad Kalinga may build you a house, the microfinance institute may give you access to credit, and your community organization may give you a voice, but what happens when you have your house, money or voice? He said: **READ.**

Finally, the group of Peñaflorida and their mentor did not wait for the Department of Education (DepEd) to reform and transform. They pushed four Ks—*Kariton, Klase, Klinika, Kanteen* (Cart, Classroom, Clinic, and Canteen)—to reach street kids with tools to learn reading and writing, soap and toothpaste for personal hygiene, drinking water and food. They brought the school and other services to kids who would not have gone to school anyway.

State colleges and universities, which number more than 1,000 and to which a substantial chunk of the education budget is allocated, should be asked to show more and better initiatives for the taxpayer's money. Unfortunately, one of the facts of life in education is that it is easier to give birth to a school, upgrade it into a college, and then elevate it into a university than to put an end to its life. A school, once established, is almost impossible to “kill.” At least, we should prevent its unnecessary elevation.

Finally, although we always dwell on backlogs of classrooms, textbooks, desks, teachers, we are silent on how to reduce the number of new entrants into the school system.

Small pleasures of daily well-being

The minimum essentials for well-being to qualify for human development seem to be food (rice to begin with); water; electricity; a body that functions reasonably well; a place to learn; a job to go to upon waking up in the morning; and a somewhat permanent address—i.e., the structure does not get easily washed away by floods or faces demolition, and there is no threat of eviction to the occupant due to the absence of the right to occupy.

Are these so difficult to achieve? There is nothing in this world that is not better enjoyed by the rich than by the poor. The song, “The best things in life are free,” is just a song. It is not for real.

Well-being is more than a numerical concept. It is a feeling that one has access to what is defined as “the good things in life.” Multi-country market surveys happily show that Filipinos take a bath (or at least want to) seven days a week. This is more frequent than for other people; hence, access to water supply is very much part of a Filipino’s sense of well-being. Soaps and shampoos sell well even during difficult times, thanks to P5 sachets. Furthermore, surveys have revealed that Filipino women feel more admired than other women.

The very great appreciation for the seven-minute showers provided to recent typhoon victims in an evacuation center is a testimony to this value on bathing. One need not be rich to take a bath at least once a day. Why couldn’t we have those small pleasures of daily living? The private sector has responded vigorously to some aspects of this demand by way of little sachets—for mayonnaise, catsup, soups, toothpaste, tomato sauce, cooking oil, coffee, tea—to give people a small taste of the “good life.”

Political freedom, civil society, and the media

Political freedom is one dimension of human capabilities that has not been directly addressed during the past 15 years of the HDN. Can we explore potential indicators?

The Philippines can be characterized as a “noisy” democracy equipped with a vibrant media to whom people go for public service requests and for redress of their grievances. When the “noise” stops, we lose our voice even if we continue to have an electoral democracy. Is the percentage of voting population actually able to vote a sensitive indicator of individual intelligent choice? What about the ability of local governments to generate their own resources and decrease reliance on central government, including presidential largesse? Where there are private armies and “private” media practitioners, there is hardly freedom of expression. On the other hand, media and “watchdog” groups who dare to monitor local government activities in the interest of transparency and accountability do so at their own risk.

The Kate Webb award given to the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) by the Agence France Presse [2009] recognizes its fearless work. For two decades, the PCIJ braved the wrath of powerful interests to expose corruption, the dangers of which were highlighted in November 2009 when at least 30 media workers were killed in the Maguindanao massacre. Quite apropos, the award prize money would set up the training program to teach reporters how to stay out of danger while carrying out investigative reports on the 200 or so families that dominate Philippine politics [Carino 2005].

In the case of civil society, the Philippines is regarded as “home to one of the most vibrant civil societies in the world.” Cariño estimates that there exist as many as half a million organizations to cater to different people’s concerns, from land issues to education, health, and social development in general. As far as available data are concerned, as of 1997, they accounted for 2 percent of the labor force, 36 times larger than the biggest private employer of the country. Volunteers who render regular unpaid service—not counting those in street demonstrations like EDSA I and II—were estimated to be 2.8 million, or 6 percent of the adult population or 1.2 percent of the economically active population.

It’s about time to ask the question: “What has civil society contributed to political freedom and human development in this country where it is seen to have a very vibrant existence?”

Human development in our “own backyard”

Human development must grow in our “own backyard.” That is where its *human face* must shine most. We must look for human development outcomes in every societal undertaking we are engaged in, whether in financial analysis; in gender and development; in the courses we teach; in science; in microfinance; in agriculture; in call centers; in the internal revenue allocations to local governments; in housing projects; in reproductive health; in the choice of candidates for the 2010 elections; in the State of the Nation Address; in the arguments for education reform; in alternative ways of waste disposal; in addressing climate change; in using media; in lifestyles; in the national university; in our leaders, local or national; in doing business; in using public resources; in the practice of medicine.

With respect to the latter, Dr. Antonio L. Dans [2001] gives this advice to medical students:

As you try to cling to your humanity, keep your strategies simple...It will not be easy, but it can be done.

Then he cites Dr. William Crosby, a strong critic of the U.S. physician’s licensure exams who once wrote the following in *Forum Medicine*:

As a physician, I would rather be humane rather than encyclopedic. I can always look up knowledge in a textbook, but where can I read about humanity?

GDP and economic growth rates are essential statistics that tell us how the nation’s economy is doing and how we compare with the performance of other countries. Although they are meticulously measured, they do not wear a human face. We must put that *face* in the HDI and its components so as to embody inspiration, aspiration, and commitment.

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