

Poverty, Inequality, and Development in the Philippines: Official Statistics and Selected Life Stories

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ABSTRACT

Mainstream academia's and neoliberal economists' failure to exhaustively explain the roots of the 2008 crisis and point a way towards how the world can fully recover from it, made radical theories of poverty and income inequality more popular and relevant as ever. Official World Bank statistics on poverty and their traditional measurements are put into question and even an IMF-funded study admits that instead of delivering growth, neoliberalism has not succeeded in bringing economic development to the broadest number of people, as massive poverty and income inequality abound in many countries, more especially in the developing world. Drawing from theories on surplus value, labor exploitation, and economic dependency, this paper will present an updated critique of the official poverty line in the Philippines and how official statistics mask the true extent of poverty in the country, thereby figuratively many faces of poverty hidden if not obliterated; analyze the link between poverty and income inequality within the country's neocolonial set-up; and present summarized selected life stories of ambulant vendors, mall personnel, fast food workers, cleaners, security guards and other typical faces of poverty in the Philippines' macro-economically rich capital region – Metro Manila – which serve as fitting counterpoints to the official narrative. Such discussion will be the paper's springboard in presenting an alternative plan towards sustainable development of the Philippines.

Keywords: poverty level, inequality, globalization,

1. Introduction

Mainstream definitions and measurements of poverty levels have come under increasing scrutiny and criticism as radical theories of poverty and income inequality recover their popularity, after more than a decade of neoliberalism's failure to resolve the 2008 crisis that hit America and segments of Europe. Reddy & Lahoti (2016) remark that the “criticisms that have been levelled at the (World) Bank's methodology since the 1990s over key technical questions—PPPs, inflation measures, price variations within countries (in particular the differing costs in rural and urban areas) and the merits of income versus consumption data” remain relevant even after World Bank economists increased the international poverty line from \$1.02 to \$1.90 in 2014. Meanwhile, Hickel (2016) minces no words in explaining how the United Nations' “MDGs have used targeted statistical manipulation to make it seem as though the poverty and hunger

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trends have been improving when in fact they have worsened. In addition, the MDGs use definitions of poverty and hunger that dramatically underestimate the scale likely of these problems. In reality, around four billion people remain in poverty today, and around two billion remain hungry – more than ever before in history, and between two and four times what the UN would have us believe.” Even World Bank-friendly experts like Chandy and Karas (2016) admit that there are “contradictions” in official poverty data and “it is surprising that the empirical basis for country and global poverty numbers is rather weak.” With regard to incongruities, a 2017 statement on poverty in the USA – by Prof. Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights – which count 40 million Americans in poverty, belies the World Bank’s poverty headcount ratio for the USA, which is just at a measly 1%.

Official World Bank statistics on poverty and their traditional measurements are put into question (Moatsos, 2017) and calls are made for the “measurement of poverty in both monetary and non-monetary dimensions” so as to “reduce poverty in all its forms” (Saunders, 2018). Even an IMF-funded study (Ostry et al., 2016) admits that instead of delivering growth, neoliberalism has not succeeded in bringing economic development to the broadest number of people, as massive poverty and income inequality abound in many countries, more especially in the developing world (San Juan, 2017).

Drawing from theories on surplus value, labor exploitation, and economic dependency, this paper will present an updated critique of the official poverty line in the Philippines and how official statistics mask the true extent of poverty in the country, thereby figuratively many faces of poverty hidden if not obliterated; analyze the link between poverty and income inequality within the country’s neocolonial set-up; and present summarized selected life stories of ambulant vendors, mall personnel, fast food workers, cleaners, security guards and other typical faces of poverty in the Philippines’ macro-economically rich capital region – Metro Manila – which serve as fitting counterpoints to the official narrative. Such discussion will be the paper’s springboard in presenting an alternative plan towards sustainable development of the Philippines.

2. Critique of Official Philippine Poverty Statistics

Official Philippine poverty statistics should be subjected to a rigorous critique, if the real extent of poverty is to be revealed as a springboard for realizing the actual breadth and depth of poverty as a national and international problem, which is the first step towards genuinely resolving the problem.

At the outset, the critique could begin with backing up Chossudovsky’s (2018) straightforward way of describing official poverty figures in the Philippines as something that “have been manipulated” as the Philippine government only appears to have “adopted the one dollar a day World Bank criterion” while failing “to account for

inflation in both the 2012 and 2015 estimates.” Such official Philippine poverty statistics focus too much on food poverty and fails to adequately encompass other essential people’s needs. Moreover, these statistics don’t consider the fact that families can be food-rich (with incomes deemed officially high enough to cover the minimum food threshold set by national authorities) and actually poor at the same time.

Even the official food poverty threshold cannot accurately measure real levels of food poverty, as it has been shockingly and significantly redefined in 2009. Such recalibration of the food poverty threshold imposed lower and thus cheaper dietary requirements for Filipino citizens, thereby artificially lowering down the official poverty statistics. The new food poverty threshold was so laughable that it was eloquently criticized even by a mainstream statistician who correctly spotted the wide gap between the old and the new methodology for measuring food poverty (Mangahas, 2011a and 2016). For example, Mangahas (2011b) notes that the new menu for the food threshold includes “no meat” for the poor (see Table 1), despite the Philippine government’s inclusion of meat in the country’s “Daily Nutritional Guide Pyramid” released by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute (see Figure 1).

Table 1. Old and New Menu in the Philippines’ Official Food Poverty Threshold (Mangahas, 2011b)

Meal	M	Old Menu	New Menu	Changes
Breakfast	Br	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tomato omelette • Coffee for adults • Milk for children • Fried rice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrambled egg • Coffee with milk • Boiled rice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of tomato • Elimination of milk for children • Substitution of fried rice with boiled rice
Lunch	Lu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fried galunggong • Mongo guisado with malunggay leaves and small shrimps (mung beans sauted in garlic, onion, tomatoes, malunggay leaves and small shrimps) • Boiled rice • Banana latundan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mongo guisado with malunggay leaves and dried dilis (mung beans sauted in garlic, onion, tomatoes, moringa leaves and dried anchovies) • Boiled rice • Banana latundan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of fish • Substitution of small shrimps with dried dilis
Dinner	Di	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pork adobo (pork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fried tulingan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of pork

inner	<p>cooked in vinegar, soy sauce, garlic, and black pepper)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pechay guisado (sauted bok choy) • Boiled rice • Banana latundan 	<p>(bullet tuna)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boiled kangkong (swamp cabbage) • Boiled rice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substitution of pork adobo with fried tulingan • Substitution of pechay guisado with boiled kangkong
acks	<p>Sn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pandesal (small common bread) with margarine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain pandesal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of margarine



Fig. 1 Daily Nutritional Guide Pyramid for Adults (Food and Nutrition Research Institute, c. 2018)

As per the latest (2015) official poverty statistics released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), “a family of 5 needed at least 9,064 pesos (US \$174) to meet both basic food and non-food needs monthly” of which 6,329 pesos (US \$122) is allotted “to meet basic food needs,” allowing only for a meager 2,735 pesos (US \$ 53) for “non-food needs.” Such pitiful amount for the non-food needs won’t cover all the items enumerated by a 2007 resolution of the country’s National Statistical Coordination Board

(NSCB): 1) clothing and footwear; 2) housing; 3) fuel, light, water; 4) maintenance and minor repairs; 5) rental of occupied dwelling units; 6) medical care; 7) education; 8) transportation and communication; 9) non-durable furnishings; 10) household operations; and 11) personal care & effects.” It must be noted that the Philippine government’s categories of essential non-food items doesn’t include any item related to leisure/entertainment, despite the fact that the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (for which the Philippines voted in favor) mentions “the right to rest and leisure...” in Article 24. Other entities such as the European Union’s Eurostat (2015) includes leisure in their “quality of life indicators.” This laudable inclusion is a reflection of the generally accepted idea that leisure is an essential human need (Leveresen et al., 2012, and Veal, 2015). Thus, a genuinely holistic poverty threshold should certainly include leisure-related items in the essential non-food items.

3. Alternative Measures of Poverty

Poverty thresholds should always include thresholds on essential non-food needs of the people. Poor citizens are those whose incomes are below the real cost of living. To help present a better view of real poverty rates in the country, the current researchers made an updated (and still very conservative) estimate of the government’s categories of non-food items based on actual Metro Manila prices:

Table 2. Detailed Monthly Cost Estimate of Non-Food Items for A Family of 5 In the Philippines (2018)

Non-Food Item	Cost for a Family of 5	Assumption/Explanation	Source of Data
Clothing and footwear	192 pesos	Assuming the family needs only two sets of clothes and footwear per year and costs are spread per month Cheapest price for t-shirt, blouse, skirt, shorts and jeans (only for the father) in the popular Divisoria Market Cheapest price for shoes (only for mother and father) and slippers (for the whole family) in the popular Divisoria Market	Price watch of the government TV Channel, People’s Television/PTV (2016a and 2016b)
Housing or rental of occupied dwelling units	9,000 pesos	Cheapest monthly rent for unfurnished studio unit in Manila (apartment prices are definitely higher)	Researchers’ own canvassing of April 2018 rent prices in Manila (listed prices in online rent

			advertisements are higher)
Fuel	415 pesos (LPG)	7-kg. LPG tank	Department of Energy (2018)
Light	1,255 pesos (light and basic appliances)	3-hour daily use of one florescent lamp; daily use of small refrigerator; 15-hour/day use of ceiling fan; 8-hour/day use of small TV	Manila Electric Company (MERALCO) online app (2018)
Water	122 pesos (water, not for drinking) 140 pesos (drinking water)	10 cubic meters of water 20 gallons of drinking water/month (common brands)	Maynilad Bill Calculator (2018) Researchers' own canvassing of April 2018 prices in Manila
Maintenance and minor repairs	250 pesos	Monthly cost of low-cost plumbing repair service (assuming repair is only done once a year)	Gawin Group (2017)
Medical care	375 pesos	Monthly cost of QualiMed AKcess Card for the family, "an affordable primary care health card used to avail of free healthcare service inclusions and discounts on outpatient or ambulatory care needs"	QualiMed (c.2018)
Education	3,000 pesos	Covers only cheap school lunches for 3 children per month (assuming that children study in public schools where tuition is free and books are provided for by the government)	Researchers' own canvassing of April 2018 prices in Manila
Transportation and communication	480 pesos 700	Covers only minimum jeepney fares per month for 1 person (assuming that the family lives in the town center and only the father commutes daily to work) Covers only cellphone load for two people (one-month unlimited calls to the same network and unlimited text to all	Fare price set by the government Smart (2018)

	pesos	networks)	
Non-durable furnishings	0	Prices of covered items are difficult to estimate; hence no estimates are given	N/A
Household operations	2,000 pesos	Cheap laundry expenses (for 80 kilos of laundry/month) Actual costs for household operations are higher as prices of other covered items and services are difficult to estimate; hence only estimates for laundry	Researchers' own canvassing of April 2018 prices in Manila
Personal care & effects	162 pesos	Bath soap (family size) at 4 bars per month	Department of Trade and Industry (2018)
TO TAL	18,091 pesos		
		(US \$ 347)	

The researchers' figures for a conservative but reliable poverty threshold is thus pegged at 24,420 pesos per month for a family of five. Such amount is more than double the government's official poverty threshold, and a bit comparable with the 33,570-peso monthly living wage for a family of six as computed (albeit without available details on costs) by Ibon Databank (2017), an independent think tank. Websites such as numbeo.com that produce statistics through crowdsourcing, can also help set the poverty threshold. As of April 2018, in what could be dubbed as the upper limit of cost of living in Manila for a four-person family, numbeo.com pegs the figure at 90,858.11 pesos without rent, while monthly rents for one-bedroom apartments range from 12,005.95 to 23,076.92 pesos. Such estimates are actually closer to another government agency's statistics.

The National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) did release its own statistics on what income is needed for a family of four to be able to live comfortably in the Philippines. Its 120,000-peso monthly figure impressively goes beyond the official poverty threshold, but the same agency downplayed the possibility of the government working towards the concretization of such ideal, emphasizing in its launch that it is just a "vision" and "not meant to be prescriptive. This is just saying where Filipinos want to go..." (Dela Paz, 2016). Nevertheless, NEDA also whimsically claims that the Philippines can attain upper middle-income status as early as 2019 (Leyco, 2018), despite the fact that the government is actually still in denial with regard to the breadth and depth of poverty in the Philippines.

Countless life stories of globalization's discontents, life stories of marginalized citizens whose lives are not documented by the government's limited statistics, life

stories of poor citizens in one of Southeast Asia's worst countries with regard to outward migration, poverty, and unemployment rates, could serve as counterpoints to the official narrative and reveal the hidden faces of poverty in the country.

4. Life Stories of Globalization's Discontents

The current researchers have interviewed – using the indigenous approach “pagtatanong-tanong” or an “improvised informal, unstructured interview” and “pakikipagkuwentuhan” or “story telling” or “informal conversations” (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) – an ambulant vendor, a mall personnel, a fast food worker, a cleaner, and a security guard: typical faces of poverty in the Philippines' macro-economically rich capital region whose life stories weave a collective tale that challenge the official government narrative and reveal aspects of poverty that are rarely discussed in official documents. They were specifically chosen as they were already encountered by the researchers, a number of times even before they were interviewed for this article.

Citations from interviewees were translated from Filipino. All of them have incomes below NEDA's definition of a comfortable family income, below the researchers' own computed poverty threshold, and below IBON Databank's family living wage threshold. Conversations with them were held from December 2017 to March 2018, during their free time. Interviewees' first names were stated as authorized by them (unless otherwise stated, in which case researchers have used a knick name).

Most of the interviewees are also part of the dominant sector in the Philippine labor force – the service sector. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2017), “56.3 percent of the total employed in 2017” are from the services sector. San Juan (2016) described how the Philippines' service sector-driven economy is rooted in the country's dependence on developed/First World economies, a system that “...is more favorable to developed/ capital-rich countries because 1) developed nations' investments in developing countries earn profits which the former typically repatriate, rather than reinvest in the latter; 2) developed countries control multilateral financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and even the biggest private banks that are capable of bankrolling or frustrating any effort towards industrialization contemplated by progressive developing countries' governments; 3) technology transfers on a massive scale seldom happens, hence developed countries tend to retain a monopoly on innovations vital to the growth of the manufacturing sector; 4) the bulk price of the developing countries' main exports (raw materials and semi-manufactured goods) is lower than the bulk price of their typical imports from developed countries (technology/ machinery and high-value products); 5) the migration of workers and professionals from developing countries to the developed countries depletes the former's human resources

which they need to free themselves from poverty and dependency; and 6) the education system of developing countries is aligned with the needs of developed/capital-rich countries which are also typical destinations of migrant workers from the developing nations.” Hence, the featured life stories are also stories of the so-called globalization’s discontents (Stiglitz, 2002), people who were unable to benefit from and/or left behind by the bonanza that neoliberal globalization brought to capitalist clans and corporations.

Emilia: The Ambulant Vendor

Emilia or “Miling” as others call her, is an elderly ambulant vendor, with very visible creases in her face burnt by daily exposure to the tropical sun in a not-so green city, Manila. As an elderly person (a “senior citizen” in the Filipino context), Miling is qualified to avail of the government’s Social Pension Program for Indigent Senior Citizens (SPISC), a “government assistance in the amount of five hundred pesos monthly stipend,” according to the Department of Social Welfare and Development website, but she tells the researchers she’s not aware that such a program exists. She’s not alone as “(s)ome 40% of Filipino senior citizens are still left behind in government efforts to provide social protection for the sector, based on estimates of the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE)” (Pasion, 2017). Miling has been selling cigarettes, candies, snacks etc. as an ambulant vendor since 1995 – a 23-year experience of “hard work with no improvement” in her words. She’s a co-breadwinner of her family of 6: her sick husband, their only daughter (a part-time waitress) who’s a single parent to their three grandchildren. In one of our conversations, Miling rails against tax hikes. She still remembers the time when the value-added tax (VAT) was expanded from 10 to 12% under the Macapagal-Arroyo regime and is disappointed when she learned that the Duterte administration’s tax reform scheme made the price of major commodities – including her wares – soar. She complains: “at times, noodles is all we can afford to eat. Or bread even in dinner time. Rice is expensive. Viands are expensive.” Other Filipinos eat *pagpag* or recycled left-over food.

Miling reveals she voted for Duterte but is now not optimistic of the future, saying “they’re all the same, no concern for the poor” (referring to various Philippine governments). She’s especially incensed that life seems to be getting more miserable every year because of constant price hikes narrating: “When I started out in this job, commodities were still cheap. You can buy many things with just one peso. Now, 1,000 pesos feels like loose change.” Like other ambulant vendors, she has suffered from the informality (or, as per the government’s perspective, “illegality”) of her occupation: “One time, the MMDA (Metro Manila Development Authority) personnel confiscated my wares. Yes, I know it’s really illegal to sell things in the streets. But this is the only occupation I know. This is better than stealing or doing something bad.” Miling’s situation reflects the lives of many Filipino elderly citizens who are poor.

Josephine: The “Saleslady”

Josephine is a permanent “saleslady” and minimum wage earner in a popular Metro Manila mall owned by one of the country’s richest clans. As a minimum wage earner, she is with 1/3 of the country’s labor force (Habito, 2017). She remains single but “in a relationship” at 32. Somehow, Jo – as she calls herself – is lucky because many mall personnel are casuals or under zero-hour contracts. She got social and health insurance (SSS and Philhealth) but also dreams of paid vacations (few companies offer such benefits in the Philippines). Jo is a credit card pawner, a “Loandoner” (a play of words: from Londoner + loan = Loandoner) as she says in local parlance, despite receiving a stable minimum wage: “what I earn is enough for our needs but I always pray that nobody in our family gets sick. Getting sick is a no-no. Be absent on just a day and you’ll have deductions from your salary. My salary will then be not enough to cover our living expense.” She belongs to the proverbial “isang kahig, isang tuka” (literally “one scratch, one peck”) class – people who live through “hand-to-mouth existence.” Not even retirement can offer her bliss. Her future SSS pension (pension fund for private employees in the Philippines) is very meager as the maximum pension at this point is just 10,900 pesos (De Vera, 2017). Jo works in a firm that will benefit from the government’s prospective corporate tax cut from 30% to 25% this year. Despite such possible tax cut and stable profits, corporations fail to share profits to workers. A relatively conservative profit-sharing bill languishes in Congress. For now, Jo will have to make do with what she has for herself and for her elderly parents too. Forced “overtime” during holidays and “sales” (discounts) periods do pad her pay but she admits: “I hate OT (overtime). Our hard work is not well compensated. It’s not worth it but I can’t complain.” Even her typical hours seems to be unbearable: “I have to stand up all the time and I’m expected to greet customers and urge them to buy, buy and buy...”

Mike: The Fastfood Worker

Mike (not his real name as he refused to give his real first name) is a contractual worker in a major fastfood firm in the Philippines. He is a beneficiary of the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment’s (DOLE) order to grant permanent status to 6,500 fastfood workers (Leonen, 2018). He is a minimum wage earner though he still considers himself “luckier than other workers” as his company provides free food (limited choices from the firm’s own menu) during his shifts. Researchers’ conversations with him veered towards food, owing to his job, and at one point, Mike casually remarks that fruits and vegetables are not part of his regular diet. He complains: “one starts to get sick of fastfood if its taken daily. Thus, I choose to bring my own food sometimes. Me and my co-workers share food when we bring some home-cooked meals.” He expresses

high hopes for the future: “I hope we really become regularized. May that DOLE order be implemented. I hope our salary gets hiked too.” As of this writing, the DOLE ruling still stands and the fastfood firm affected by the order promises compliance, but the Philippine President – more than a week before the International Day of Labor this year – announced that he would no longer sign an executive order to end contractualization in the Philippines (a convenient campaign promise which has been rendered superfluous when Duterte is already in power, hobnobbing with capitalists, both local and foreign), claiming that it’s up to Congress to ban the said hated policy which many firms utilize to save on costs at labor’s expense. Mike is a young, 20-something “bedspacer” (one who co-rents a room with two or more persons) in Manila, renting at a rate of 2,000 per month. The said rent may sound cheap for expatriates but such “bedspace” is literally living in a small box, occupying space in double-decked beds, rather than living in a spacious home. To help him make both ends meet, he claims to have a “sideline” (“raket” is the Filipino word he used, which in the Filipino context generally refers to a legal “sideline,” though it can also be used to refer to shadier occupations), but he declined to give details. Mike is originally from the Oriental Mindoro, where his peasant parents still reside. As the eldest child in a brood of 4, he sends money to his parents whenever he can, to help support the needs of his younger siblings. Mike did not mention if his parents own the land that they till but many farmers in the Philippines are landless and the country’s land reform program has been criticized for its hosts of failures (Sawchencko, 2000; Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2015; Tadem, 2015; Manahan, 2011; Carranza, 2015). As a result, migration from rural to urban areas is still very common, as Mike’s story illustrates.

Nora: The Freelance Cleaner

Nora is a middle-aged freelance cleaner in condominium units, who is married to a jeepney driver. She spreads word about her services through word of mouth, impressively earning an income above the minimum wage but nevertheless describes herself as “still poor,” narrating: “My income is okay because my customers pay big tips. Sometimes, they double my rate. But somehow, my income is not enough because prices keep going up. I have medicines to take, maintenance medicine for high blood pressure. And we still pay for our children’s education.” Despite her complaints on rising prices and other tribulations common to the Filipino poor, she praises her more generous customers, whom she says even treat her to free movie tickets: “Whenever I receive free tickets, my family goes to the cinema. We can’t afford it if it’s not free.” They have two sons and one daughter. One just finished college and is now looking for a job, in a country where unemployment is generally worst in Southeast Asia. Two of their children are still in high school. At least, tuition in college would no longer be a problem because of the government’s recently passed free tuition legislation, though various student

groups warn that its implementation should be monitored to ensure that the poor benefits from it. Nora and her husband now only need to save for other university-related expenses. Their relatively secure situation could be unfortunately reversed by the fact that the government would soon phase out jeepneys (Bautista and Lema, 2018), possibly putting Nora's husband into unemployment, and Nora obviously can't be a cleaner forever. She admits with a hint of sadness: "my job is difficult. I suffer from arthritis at times. My joints ache but I need to be industrious always for our family."

Ramon: The Security Guard

Ramon is a security guard in a Manila midrise, approaching 40 years old, and married to a bank teller. He has two young children. He earns the minimum wage and resides in a rented apartment in Caloocan – one train ride and a jeepney ride away from his work place. He clocks in nearly 12 hours per day to earn overtime pay and make both ends meet, complaining that: "coffee no longer works in my case. I do some exercise, some stretching when I am sleepy. You can't be sleep, you can't be sleepy in our job." The old labor slogan "8 hours of work, 8 hours of rest, and 8 hours of recreation" has been overtaken by workers' poverty in the Philippines, and some German workers' successful fight for a 28-hour week is still the exception, rather than the rule, these days. Ramon makes sure he still got time for his family despite his long work hours: "I always make time for them. We eat out, in the nearest mall, when it's my day of rest and when I have extra money." He dreams of buying their own house. He says commercial bank loans are definitely out of his options because of the high interest rates and the shorter loan terms. The Philippine government has the so-called Pag-ibig Fund, which provides loans for Filipino workers who want to buy their own houses, but his and his wife's combined income and their choice of house (a detached, non-socialized housing unit) are making things difficult for them, but Ramon says they're going to try again this year.

5. Plan for Sustainable Development in the Philippines

Sustainable development means development that is holistic, broad-based and egalitarian: development that will write better stories for the countless faces of poverty under the current system. The relationship between egalitarianism and sustainability is strong because the precisely inegalitarian nature of the current dominant economic system allows a tiny global elite to seemingly endlessly accumulate wealth at the expense of the environment and everyone else. Centuries of wealth accumulation of the elites worldwide have caused massive destruction in many parts of the globe, the effects of which are still being felt today through global warming and the extreme climate change that it brings. A world where a small group of clans and corporations are allowed to accumulate wealth without limitations for their equally endless luxuries and/or in pursuit

of absurd goals such as growth for growth's sake, is a world without space for the needs of the poor majority – a ticking time bomb that is unsustainable and bound for collapse, if not already now on the verge of imminent apocalypse.

In the Philippines, the economic system can only become egalitarian if sweeping reforms towards broad-based development such as land reform, agricultural modernization, and industrialization are enacted. Such reforms are necessary for a Third World country to leapfrog into First World status, while ensuring environmental sustainability. To ensure that economic development and environmental sustainability are achieved together, full-blast research on and utilization of renewable energy is necessary. As a tropical archipelago surrounded by water, the Philippines is a prospective role model and leader in the field of renewable energy harnessed from the sun and the seas.

These sweeping reforms should be coupled with progressive tax reform – along the lines advocated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* and also advocated now even by non-Marxists like Thomas Piketty (2014) and Joseph Stiglitz (2013) – as only an egalitarian system will enable the government to lead initiatives in ensuring that accumulated wealth from economic development is utilized for the people's essential needs and holistic enjoyment of life. Progressive taxation is a preliminary step towards a radically more holistic paradigm shift – from profit motive to people- and Earth-centeredness, from endless macroeconomic growth and elite wealth accumulation to sustainable development and wealth redistribution, from strengthening corporations to empowering communities – a shift that will genuinely precipitate sustainable development for current and future generations.

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